

6/7/1374

JULIA OF BAIÆ,

OR

The Days of Nero.

A STORY OF THE MARTYRS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER,"
"VIRGINIA," "CHRISTMAS BELLS," ETC., ETC.

Brown, Rev. John

The beauteous souls! Eternity's own band!
Who in Life's battle firm doth stand,
Shall bear hope's tender blossoms
Into the Silent Land.

SALIS.

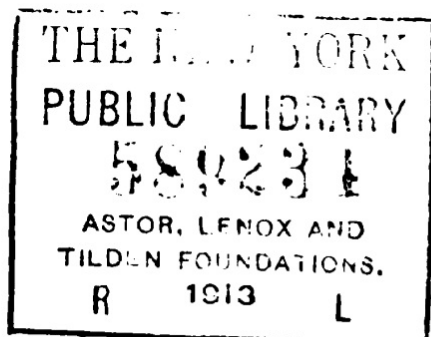
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THE REV. FREDERICK J. GOODWIN, M. A.,

RECTOR OF ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, FLUSHING.

MY DEAR GOODWIN:—

I would not take the liberty of dedicating so slight a performance as this to you, were I not assured that the friendship which has so long existed between us, will lead you to look upon its defects with an eye of kindness. Nor should I have ventured upon the offering, were not the subject I have chosen intimately associated with the remembrance of those happy and profitable hours which we have spent together in the most interesting of all historical studies.

In connecting the development of my simple narrative with some of those tragical events which have made the reign of Nero a proverb among men, I have endeavored to give a faithful and condensed view of the history and spirit of the time, avoiding those minute details, which the pen of one of the most profound historians of antiquity has preserved. My design would not permit me to avoid altogether the disgusting

atrocities of the age : but upon these I have touched as lightly as possible, choosing rather to sacrifice somewhat of the interest which might otherwise have been thrown around the narrative, than to sully my page with impurity.

Although the course of the story is strictly connected with historical events, I have availed myself of the liberty allowed to writers of fiction, to deviate somewhat from strict chronological order. In the characters chosen from history, I have endeavored to preserve and develope those traits for which they were distinguished. In Julius Metellus you will perhaps recognize some resemblance to Lateranus, although it was necessary to my purpose to deviate widely from the actual history of the latter. With the character of Flavius the tribune, I have also taken considerable—although I believe not an unjustifiable, liberty. In Epicharis, whose singular enthusiasm, firmness, and contempt of suffering, under circumstances which caused the stoutest hearts to tremble, have been honorably mentioned by Tacitus, I have endeavored to represent one, to whose mind the truth had addressed itself with power, but whose heart, through self-reliance and ambitious zeal, remained unsubdued by the spirit of Christian love and gentleness. Religious fanaticism, the element of ardent and impatient spirits, which are ever prone to imagine that their own cherished enterprizes, however rash or unholy, are sanctioned by heaven, is not inconsistent with character and conduct, which Tacitus acknowledges to have been extraordinary and even noble.

I may, perhaps, be accused of assigning too prominent a position to Christianity in the times embraced within the period of this narrative. That this is not the case, is clear, I think, from the circumstances connected with the persecution which arose immediately after the burning of Rome, to which

I have alluded in another place. The records of the New Testament will serve to convince us that some of the first triumphs of the Cross were gained among the Roman soldiery, and there is everything to favor the instrumentality by which the knowledge of the truth is represented to have been brought to the mind of the daughter of the patrician, Metellus.

Although the development of the conspiracy of Piso is intimately connected with the course of the narrative, my design has not led me to dwell at length upon the catastrophe of that plot. The fact that the Christians, as such, were not implicated in it, will be a sufficient explanation of this omission.

In the death of Burrhus, and the appearance of Vespasian, as a centurion of the Prætorian guards, you will recognize considerable departure from the strict historical order of events, the reason of which will be evident.

The extract which I have ventured to introduce, at the conclusion of the introductory chapter, from the recent work of Mr. Milman, while it exhibits, with great clearness and eloquence, what I believe to have been the religious aspect of the age, may seem to some readers to dwell too much upon the agency of second causes in preparing the Roman world for the reception of Christianity, while it does not sufficiently recognize the immediate agency of the Spirit of God in scattering the mists of delusion and subduing the proud mind of man to the "truth as it is in Jesus." To those, however, who, like you, are familiar with that valuable work as a whole, it will present itself in a different light, although we may be led to wish that the author had been more decided on these vital points.

But I fear that I am growing tedious; and as the public is

wont to judge of a book, not by the design which existed in the mind of the author, but by the manner in which that design is executed, further explanation is unnecessary, and might be presumptuous. With a general acknowledgement, therefore, of the rashness of which I have been guilty in committing to the press so hasty a performance, I trust, my dear Goodwin, that my critics, if I deserve any, will bring to it something of the same kind and excusing spirit with which you will receive it. While with the many friends to whom you are endeared, I lament the protracted indisposition which calls you for a season from our midst, I am happy in the hope that these idle pages may bring to your heart, while sojourning on those distant and beautiful shores where the scene of the narrative is laid, some faint remembrances of your home.

Ever, your friend,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE rapid sale of the first edition of this work, together with the very general approbation it has won from the press, secular as well as religious, furnishes the best encouragement to the author in the prosecution of a long-cherished design;—that of illustrating the history and aspect of Christianity during several of the early persecutions, until the last and fiercest struggle of paganism in the reign of Dioclesian. The present work was merely an experiment, too hastily made; but which, from the intrinsic interest of the subject, has succeeded far beyond his hopes. Conscious, as he is, that it falls very far short of what it ought to have been, the flattering reception which, notwithstanding all its faults, it has received, is sufficient to inspire him with the hope, that he may yet produce something in this way less unworthy of the attention of the public. He feels that he has entered

upon a rich field, almost unoccupied ; a field in which the greatest success would be but doubtful honor, and wherein total failure would be disgrace indeed.

Several important corrections, principally in the introductory chapter, have been made in this edition. References are also added, in the same chapter, to one or two authorities, which the author had neglected to supply from his common-place book. These will be sufficient to designate to the reader, the sources from which his materials for the scenery and leading incidents have been drawn.

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" Ecce res magna, habere imbecillitatem hominis, securitatem Dei."

SENECA, Epist. 53.

BOOK THE FIRST.

BALE.

—— Yet here methinks
Truth wants no ornament, in her own shape
Filling the mind by turns with awe and love ;
By turns inclining to wild ecstasy,
And soberest meditation. ROGERS' ITALY.

BOOK I

THE SCENE AND THE TIME.

The Cumæan towers,
There did they rise sun-gilt; and here thy groves
Delicious BAYÆ.

THERE is no region of country more beautiful, and none whose various attractions have been more celebrated, than that which embraces Naples and its environs, in the Campania of ancient Italy. The same enchanting scenery and delicious atmosphere which wooed the leisure and regaled the senses of the earlier Roman Emperors, which inspired some of the noblest efforts of the Latin historians and orators, and the sweetest strains of Latin poetry, which have been consecrated by the genius of Virgil, and the eloquent enthusiasm of Tully, have been equally celebrated in our day by the thousands of tourists and devotees of art, to whom

Naples is still a city of the Siren,¹ and Campania a land of enchantment. As the eye of the traveller lingers over its beauties, and the pure and balmy atmosphere bathes his senses in delight, he ceases to wonder that even the tyrants of the creation loved this alluring region, spared it, adorned it, lived in it, and died in it. With a climate which seems to etherealize the body, and a landscape composed of the most beautiful interchange of sea and land; here are wines, fruits, and provisions in their highest excellence; a vigorous and luxuriant nature, unparalleled in its productions and processes; all the wonders of volcanic power spent or in action; antiquities different from all other antiquities on earth; a coast which was once the fairy land of poets, and the favorite retreat of great men. Nothing can surpass the beauty of the bay, and the prospect of the modern city, with its interesting suburbs, when viewed from the water, where it appears broken into great masses, and covered by long lines of hanging gardens, palaces, and terraced roofs. The outline upon the sea is strikingly indented, the shipping is clustered behind the moles, and castles and towers rise on the points of projection. The shores of the bay are covered with interesting ruins, and broken into graceful inlets. To the east, the dark towering summit of Vesuvius rises, frowning, over the landscape, while its lower regions are covered with the richest vegetation, and dotted with white country houses. Inland, the city is terminated by a range of gentle hills, clothed with gardens, vineyards, and forest trees, except where the hill of St. Elmo, crowned by its mammoth castle, rears its head high above the surrounding region, and overlooks the city, the sea, and the rich and varied scenery, and the nu-

merous towns and villages with which the coast of the bay and the country are covered, far as the eye can reach.*

Leaving the city on the east, the traveller approaches Mount Pausilippo, through which, for the distance of more than a mile, was cut the magnificent tunnel which bears the name of the Grotto of Pausilippo, one of the most striking memorials of antiquity which has descended to modern times. Beyond this is the Lago Agnano, with the Grotto Del Cane on its banks, and not far off arises Solfatara, a volcanic cone from which sulphureous vapors constantly issue. Then succeeds Puzzeoli, the ancient Puteoli or city of the wells, one of the most extensive seaports and places of trade in the ancient world, whose remarkable ruins and indestructible beauty of situation, remain to attest its ancient charms and splendor. There, says a modern visiter,² immense quantities of grain raised on the fertile banks of the Nile, and other costly productions of the east were landed. Beyond this is Baia, once crowded with the villas of the nobility and Emperors of Rome :—

Delicious BAIA, where, (what would they not)
The masters of the earth, unsatisfied,
Built in the sea; where now the boatman steers
O'er many a crypt and vault yet glimmering,
O'er many a broad and indestructible arch,
The deep foundations of their palaces;

for here, in truth, the wealthy encroached upon the sea, in their eagerness to have a dwelling in a place combining so much of the beauty and highest magnificence both of nature and of art. Next to this lies Cumæ, founded before the Trojan war, the abode of the sybil, and one of the oldest and most populous cities of ancient Italy. The far-

* See Goodrich, Universal Geog., Art. Naples.

the point of the landscape is Cape Misenum, a bold promontory, washed by the waves, around whose base the fleet of the Roman Emperors used to anchor. These points command a view of the rich and varied beauties by which the bay of Naples is surrounded, while near them are the Elysian fields, the fabled abodes of the blessed; and lake Avernus with its dark and mysterious interest, and the grotto of the Cumæan sybil, the entrance to the world below—places which the genius of Virgil has clothed with the rich and splendid drapery of religious poetry and romance.

Everywhere

Fable and truth have shed in rivalry,
 Each her peculiar influence. Fable came,
 And laughed and sung, arraying truth in flowers
 Like a young child a grandam. Fable came,
 Earth, sea, and sky, reflecting as she flew
 A thousand, thousand colors not their own:
 And at her bidding, lo! a dark descent
 To Tartarus and those thrice happy fields
 Those fields with ether pure and purple light
 Ever invested, scenes by him described.
 Who here was wont to wander, to record,
 What they revealed, and on the western shore
 Sleeps in a silent grave, o'erlooking thee,
 Beloved Parthenope. 3

To this hasty glance at the natural scenery of the region in which the following tale is for the most part laid, it seems necessary to add a few words in relation to the general features of the age to which we are about to transport the reader. The dark picture which the sombre but faithful pencil of Tacitus has drawn of the cruel and licentious reign of Nero, is scarcely to be equalled in all the exhibitions which ancient or modern history has presented to our view. The actors in those bloody and disgraceful tragedies which the Annals describe with such dreadful minuteness, seem

to us to be, for the most part, alien from the common nature of man. Such malignant and fiend-like wickedness, we hesitate to acknowledge even as the natural produce of an unrestrained and licentious heathenism. Here and there indeed, there are bright exceptions, in characters illustrious for virtue, integrity and humanity ; and we hail with enthusiasm, the truly Roman greatness of Burrhus, the integrity of Plautius Lateranus, and even the wavering faithfulness of Seneca, and the singular constancy of Epicharis. But characters like these only serve to heighten, by contrast, the intense moral gloom which seems to have settled, as the curse of heaven, upon the Roman world.

The grinding avarice, licentious extravagance, and intolerable cruelties of Caligula, terminated happily for mankind, by the dagger of the assassin, were succeeded, after a short interval of hope, by the effeminate viciousness of Claudius, and the dreadful crimes of Messalina. Agrippina, whom Claudius espoused on the shameful desertion of the latter, while she equalled that disgrace to womanhood in crime, surpassed her in energy and boldness. By employing every engine of vice and inhumanity, she paved the way for the succession of Nero, her own son by Domitius, to the imperial throne ; and the speedy death of Claudius by poison from her own hand, placed him without a rival upon that "bad eminence." Every reader of history is acquainted with the arts by which she sought to withdraw him from the influence of his preceptor Seneca, and to continue the same bold course of public profligacy and crime which she had commenced under Claudius. Perceiving in him, soon after his accession, a determined aversion to all the cares of government, her effort was to

render this disposition subservient to her own purposes, by ruling everything according to her own will. The faithfulness and vigilant zeal of Seneca, whom Nero had not yet begun to hate, advised him of the danger, and warned him of its probable consequences. The prompt dismissal of all her chief confidants and favorites from court, proved the serious attention with which he had received the admonitions of the philosopher. His growing passion for Poppæa, the aspiring beauty who could not brook her influence, added to her misfortunes. But the guilty ambition of Agrippina prompted her to seek a terrible revenge. The design of proposing Britannicus, the son of Claudius, to the Prætorian guards, and of acknowledging before them the crimes she had committed in order to bring Nero to the throne, was crushed in its birth by the murder of Britannicus, and Nero in turn revenged himself by seeking the murder of his mother. During the interval which elapsed since the conception of this crime and its execution, our tale commences. While it is our intention to avoid as much as possible, the shameful atrocities of the age, it is necessary that the veil should be at least in part withdrawn, and some of its "chambers of imagery" exposed to view. But we trust that these dark scenes will be softened, if not obscured, by the spectacle of true patriotism yet lingering around its ancient and glorious haunts, of the nobleness of suffering virtue, and of the beauty and majesty of Christian faith.

It is scarcely possible to conceive of anything more deplorably wretched than the condition of the Roman people during the administration of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero and Vitellius. For fourscore years, says Gibbon, Rome groaned be-

neath an unremitting tyranny, which exterminated the ancient families of the republic, and was fatal to almost every virtue and every talent that arose during that unhappy period. Under these monsters, the slavery of the Romans was accompanied by two peculiar circumstances ; the one occasioned by their former liberty, the other by their extensive conquests, which rendered their condition more completely wretched than that of the victims of tyranny in any other age or country. From these causes were derived the exquisite sensibility of the sufferers, and the impossibility of escaping from the hand of the oppressors. Oppressed beneath the weight of their own corruption and of military violence, they for a long time preserved the sentiments, or at least, the ideas, of their free born ancestors. Hence, while, for a long time, the shadow of justice was preserved, the authority of the senate was prostituted to the vilest purposes of tyranny, and the tyrants enjoyed a secret pleasure in rendering the people their accomplices as well as their victims. Besides this, the empire of the Romans filled the world, and when that empire fell into the hands of a single person, the world became a safe and dreary prison for his enemies. The slave of imperial despotism, whether he was condemned to drag his gilded chain in Rome and the senate, or to wear out a life of exile on the barren rock of Seriphus, or the frozen banks of the Danube, expected his fate in silent despair. To resist was fatal, and it was impossible to fly. On every side he was encompassed by a vast extent of sea and land, which he could never hope to traverse without being discovered, seized, and restored to his irritated master. Beyond the frontiers, his anxious view could discover nothing, except the

ocean or inhospitable deserts, hostile tribes of barbarians of fierce manners and unknown language, or dependent kings, who would gladly purchase the emperor's protection by the sacrifice of an obnoxious fugitive. "Wherever you are," said Cicero to the exiled Marcellus, "remember that you are equally within the power of the conqueror."⁴

To the modern reader, perhaps, the most interesting event connected with the reign of Nero, is that of the first persecution of the Christians, so basely accused of a crime of which his own hand had been guilty, but which, to escape the popular odium, he endeavored to lay to the charge of the adherents of the new religion. Almost to this period, Christianity had been regarded, and openly treated by the heathen world, as an unimportant sectarian dispute about the national faith of the Jews. From certain proofs which we gather from the record of the Acts of the Apostles, and the history of the times, it is evident that an acknowledged separation had taken place between the Jewish and Christian communities, and that the distinction began to be perceived by those who were the inveterate foes of both. In the time of Nero, the Christians must have been a considerable body, and not altogether destitute of respectability or influence. A very obscure sect would not have attracted the notice of the successor of the Cæsars, or have satisfied his blood-thirsty cruelty. The people, as justly remarked by a living historian,⁵ would not have consented to receive them as atoning victims for the dreadful disaster of the conflagration, nor would the reckless tyranny of the Emperor have condescended to select them as sacrificial offerings to appease the popular fury, unless they had been numerous far above contempt, and already looked

upon with a jealous eye. The Christians were no longer a mere sect of the parent nation, but a separate, a marked and peculiar people, known by their distinctive usages, and incorporating many of Gentile descent, into their original Jewish community. The manner in which Tacitus speaks of them, in view more particularly of their supposed connection with the burning of Rome, while he acknowledges the malicious falsehood of the charge brought against them, is probably familiar to most of our readers. The absurd crimes charged upon them by common report, and the determined manner in which they opposed themselves to the idolatry of the heathen world, were sufficient to inflame the minds of the populace against them, and doubtless suggested the accusation of Nero, which none believed, however all might have been gratified by the persecution which ensued. Although Tacitus himself, hurried away by the torrent of popular prejudice, calls Christianity a dangerous superstition, and indirectly offers an apology for Nero, we find that his friend Pliny, during the administration of the government of Bithynia, thought and acted with moderation. The Christians were under a persecution. Pliny in his character of proconsular governor, was at a loss how to proceed. He wrote to the Emperor Trajan on the subject, and after stating that the real Christians were not to be forced by any means whatever to renounce the articles of their belief, he proceeds to the sum total of their guilt, which he found to be as follows : They met on a stated day, before it was light, and addressed themselves in a prayer or hymn to Christ as God, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for any wicked purpose, but never to commit any

fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust reposed in them, after which it was their custom to separate, and then re-assemble to eat their meal together, in a manner perfectly harmless and inoffensive. This letter of Pliny was preserved by the Christians themselves, as a clear and unsuspecting evidence of the purity of their doctrines. It is, therefore, with good reason, says Brotier, that Tertullian, in a strain of exultation declares, that the Christians, for their innocence, their probity, truth, justice, and for the living God, were burnt alive. "The cruelty, ye persecutors, is all your own : the glory is ours."*

When one so gifted and learned as the author of the "Last Days of Pompeii," has failed in representing truly the religious spirit of the Roman world amidst its decaying superstitions, and an awakening philosophical spirit, inferior powers may well shrink from attempting that task, however slightly. In the representation which he has feebly essayed to give, the author has derived much assistance from the profound and truly eloquent dissertations of Milman, to whose work allusion has before been made. He will, therefore, make no apology for laying the reader under similar obligations to his own, by adding the observations of that historian, on points intimately connected with the design of the tale. The mental childhood of the human race, he observes, was passing away ; at least it had become wearied of its old toys. The education, itself, by which, according to these generally judicious writers, the youthful mind was to be impregnated with reverential feelings for the objects of national

* See Murphy's Tacitus, note to sec. 43 of book xv.

worship, must have been coldly conducted by teachers, conscious that they were practising a pious fraud upon their disciples, and perpetually embarrassed by the necessity of maintaining the gravity befitting such solemn subjects, and of suppressing the involuntary smile which might betray the secret of their own impiety. One class of fables seems to have been universally exploded, even in the earliest youth—those which related to another life. The picture of the unrivalled satirist may be overcharged, but it corresponds strictly with the public language of the orator, and the private sentence of the philosopher :

The silent realm of disembodied ghosts,
The frogs that croak along the Stygian coasts ;
The thousand souls in one crazed vessel steer'd,
Not boys believe, save boys without a beard."

Even the religious Pausanius speaks of the immortality of the soul, as a foreign doctrine, introduced by the Chaldeans and the Magi, and embraced by some of the Greeks, particularly by Plato. Pliny, whose *Natural History* opens with a declaration that the universe is the sole deity, devotes a separate chapter to a contemptuous exposure of the idle notion of the immortality of the soul, as a vision of human pride, and equally absurd, whether under the form of existence in another sphere, or under that of transmigration.

What remained for minds thus enlightened beyond the poetic faith of their ancestors, yet not ripe for philosophy ? How was the craving for religious excitement to be appeased, which turned with dissatisfaction or disgust from its accustomed nutriment ? Here is the secret of the remarkable union between the highest reason and the most abject

superstition which characterizes the age of Imperial Rome. Every foreign religion found proselytes in the capital of the world; not only the pure and rational theorism of the Jews, which had made a progress, the extent of which it is among the most difficult questions in history to estimate, but the oriental rites of Phrygia, and the Isiac and Serapic worship of Egypt, which in defiance of the edict of the magistrate and the scorn of the philosopher, maintained their ground in the capital, and were so widely propagated among the provinces, that their vestiges may be traced in the remote districts of Gaul and Britain; and at a later period, the reviving Mithriac mysteries, which in the same manner made their way into the western provinces of the empire. In the capital itself, everything that was new, or secret, or imposing, found a welcome reception among a people that listened with indifference to philosophers who reasoned, and poets who embodied philosophy in the most attractive diction. For in Rome, poetry had forsworn the alliance of the old imaginative faith. The irreligious system of Euhemerus had found a translator in Ennius; that of Epicurus was commended by the unrivalled powers of Lucretius. Virgil himself, who, as he collected from all quarters the beauties of ancient poetry, so he inlaid in his splendid tessellation the noblest images of the poetic faith of Greece; yet though at one moment he transfuses mythology into his stately verse with all the fire of an ardent votary, at the next he appears as a pantheist, and describes the Deity but as the animating soul of the universe. An occasional fit of superstition crosses over the careless and Epicurean apathy of Horace. Astrology and witchcraft led captive minds which boast-

ed themselves emancipated from the idle terrors of the avenging gods. In the *Pharsalia* of Lucan, which manifestly soars far above the vulgar theology, where the lofty stoicism elevates the brave man, who disdains, above the gods, who flatter, the rising fortunes of Cæsar; yet, in the description of the witch Erictho evoking the dead (the only purely imaginative passage in the whole rhetorical poem), there is a kind of tremendous truth and earnestness, which show, that if the poet himself believed not "the magic wonders which he drew," at least he well knew the terrors that would strike the age in which he wrote. The old established traders in human credulity had almost lost their occupation; but their place was supplied by new empirics, who swarmed from all quarters. The oracles were silent, while astrology seized the administration of the secrets of futurity. Pompey, and Crassus, and Cæsar, all consulted the Chaldeans, whose flattering predictions that they should die in old age, in their homes, in glory, so belied by their miserable fates, still brought not the unblushing science into disrepute. The repeated edicts which expelled the astrologers and mathematicians from Rome, was no less an homage to their power over the public mind, than their recall, the tacit permission to return, or the return in defiance of the insulted edict. Banished by Agrippa, by Augustus, by Tiberius, by Claudius, they are described, in the inimitable language of Tacitus, as a race who, treacherous to those in power, fallacious to those who hope for power, are ever proscribed, yet will ever remain. They were at length taken under the avowed patronage of Vespasian and his successors. All these circumstances were manifest indications

of the decay, and of the approaching dissolution of the old religion. The elegiac poet had read, not without sagacity, the signs of the times,

None sought the aid of foreign gods, while bow'd
Before their native shrines the trembling crowd.

And thus, in their struggle between the old household deities of the established faith, and the half domiciliated gods of the stranger, undermined by philosophy, supplanted by still darker superstition, polytheism seemed, as it were, to await its death-blow ; and to be ready to surrender its ancient honors to the conqueror, whom Divine Providence should endow with sufficient authority over the human mind to seize upon the abdicated supremacy.

Such is the state in which the ancient world leaves the mind of man. On a sudden, a new era commences ; a rapid yet gradual revolution takes place in the opinions, sentiments, and principles of mankind ; the void is filled ; the connection between religion and morals re-established, with an intimacy of union yet unknown. The unity of the Deity becomes, not the high and mysterious creed of a privileged sacerdotal or intellectual oligarchy, but the common property of all whose minds are fitted to receive it : all religious distinctions are annihilated ; the jurisdictions of all local deities abolished ; and, imperceptibly the empire of Rome becomes one great Christian commonwealth, which even sends out, as it were, its peaceful claims into regions beyond the limits of the imperial power. The characteristic distinction of the general revolution is this—that the physical agency of the Deity seems to recede from view, while the spiritual character is more distinctly unfolded ; or, rather, the notion of the

Divine Power is merged in the more prevailing sentiment of his moral goodness. The remarkable passage in the Jewish history, in which God is described as revealing himself to Elijah, "neither in the strong wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still small voice," may be considered, we will not say prophetic, but singularly significant of the sensations to be excited in the human mind by the successive revelations of the Deity. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul partook in the same change with the notion of the Deity : it became at once popular, simple, and spiritual. It was disseminated throughout all orders of society : it admitted no aristocratic elysium of heroes and demi-gods, like that of the early Greeks : it separated itself from that earlier and widely prevalent form, which it assumed in the agonies of the nature-worship, where the soul, emanating from the source of Being, after one or many transmigrations, was reabsorbed into the Divine Essence. It announced the resurrection of all mankind to judgment, and the reunion of the spirit to a body, which preserving the principle of identity, nevertheless should be of a purer and more imperishable nature. Such are the great primary principles which became incorporated with the mind of man ; and, operating on all human institutions on the common sentiments of the whole race, form the great distinctive difference between the ancient and the modern, the European and the Asiatic world. During the dark ages, there was a strong reaction of barbarism : in its outward form, christianity might appear to recede towards the polytheism of older times ; and as has been shown, not in a philosophic, but in a narrow polemic spirit of hostility to the church of Rome, many of the rites

and usages of heathenism were admitted into the christian system; yet the indelible difference between the two periods remained. A higher sense and meaning was infused into these forms: God was considered in his moral rather than his physical attributes—as the Lord of the future, as much or even more than of the present world. The saints and angels, who have been compared to the intermediate deities of the older superstitions, had, nevertheless, besides their tutelar power against immediate accidents and temporal calamities, an important influence over the state of the soul in the world to come; they assumed the higher office of ministering the hopes of the future in a still greater degree than the blessings of the present life.

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLA OF A PATRICIAN.

——— Here the vines
Wed each her elm, and o'er the golden grain
Hang their luxuriant clusters, chequering
The sunshine ; where, when cooler shadows fall
And the mild moon her fairy net-work weaves,
The lute or mandoline, accompanied
By many a voice yet sweeter than her own,
Kindles, nor slowly.

ROGERS.

OUR tale opens at Baiæ, during that season of the year when nature is arrayed in her most engaging charms. The delicious month of May was drawing to its close, and the foliage had already assumed the deep and living green of early summer. Over the luxuriant robe of the forest trees, over the waving fields of grain and the clustering verdure of the vines, had passed that soft and sweet change which betokens the advance of a season whose every aspect presents new and more exquisite beauty. Flowers and blossoms yet covered the earth in profusion. The red clover upon the meadows, and the scarlet flowers of the wild poppy upon the terraces of Baiæ, and the hill side beyond, were beautifully contrasted with the deep green of the grass, and the groves of the olive and the

orange, of the arbutus and myrtle. The picturesque outlines and dark hues of the stone pine were displayed to their best advantage on the heights, while the oleander and the laurel clustered richly upon the terraces below, rising out of and bordering the flowery carpet which extended to the very edge of the water.

The villa of Julius Metellus, the wealthy and popular patrician of Rome, occupied a position equally lovely and commanding, on the western division of the bay towards the promontory of Misenum. Beyond it, in a western direction extended a magnificent park, whose lofty and spreading trees were evidently the growth of many years. Delightful gardens lay on either side with statues, fountains, and mimic temples, gleaming through the pleasant vistas, while the soft and cool murmur of the waters seemed like the breath of some genial spirit, whose home was among the flowers. The portico of the villa, separated from the main building by a court or *atrium*, was in itself a Doric structure open to the sea, and built so far upon the shore, that the brows of the heavy arches below were continually washed by the waves. This portico not only commanded a view of the gulf in front and of the neighboring islands, but that of Mount Pausilippo, and of the near suburbs of Naples, or Neapolis, while dark and vast in the east arose the summit of Vesuvius, from which a heavy column of smoke was continually rising.

The night, exquisitely calm and serene, had already closed upon the landscape and the sea. The murmur of the water in the fountains and aqueducts was blending with the soft and regular dash and swell of the waves of the gulf, on

marble arch and verdant shore, and, as if in concert with the music, nightingales were singing in the groves. Far as the eye could reach, the scene was reposing in the beautiful stillness of nature. The blue transparent firmament rose brilliantly overhead, and half-way from the horizon the young moon, serene in crescent light, rose to her meridian through troops of stars. Here and there on the ample expanse of the eastern sky, soft and silvery-tinted clouds were floating, like islands on a sea, and the cloudy pillar of Vesuvius rose like a giant in the distance, spanning earth and heaven.

Two persons of different sexes stood within the portico, enjoying the beauty and balmy coolness of the night. One of these, the elder and graver, was clad in the graceful undress of a Roman citizen; the simple and snowy tunic, however, displaying those peculiar marks which designated the wearer to be of patrician rank. His form was tall and commanding, and his strongly marked but pleasing features revealed intelligence, energy, and benevolence of disposition. Upon his brow sat the air of one accustomed to command, while the full dark eye bespoke a mind clear in conception, and resolute in action. The air of sternness which his countenance might at times be said to wear, was relieved by the open smile which played about his lips, as a pleasant thought in his own mind, or a happy reply from his companion, called it forth.

She who stood beside him, with her arm slightly resting in his, was younger by many years, for her form was just bursting into the beautiful grace and fulness of womanhood. Singularly lovely as she was, the strong semblance of near relationship might be traced in the exquisitely chiselled outline of her

face. There was the same clear expanse and nobleness of brow, relieved by the softer and less prominent mould of the female countenance. There too was the full, dark eye, but softer and more tender in its expression, and the same open, engaging smile which seemed to linger about her lips as its usual resting-place. Her form was youthful, and so slight, that had it not been for the hue upon her cheek, and the vivacity in her eye, she might have been thought an invalid. The long tunic of pure white, with its broad and glossy fringe of purple, and its silken girdle, betokened the Roman maiden "of high degree," and the ear-rings of pearl, the bracelet upon the shoulder, and the large golden ring, denoted the daughter of one of wealth. A simple head-dress of fine linen was flung across her hair, simply parted in front and confined behind, in the modest fashion recently introduced from the Greeks. Slippers and sandals of perfumed leather, secured by clasps of mother of pearl, completed her attire.

For a few moments the two stood in silence, gazing out upon the gulf, as if absorbed in reflections which their conversation had suggested to the mind of each. Now and then a light from the distant barges of Neapolis would enkindle, like a star, upon the calm waters, or the sweep of oars from some galley near the islands, break the stillness which reigned o'er the deep.

"See'st thou, my daughter?" at length, asked the patrician, for the reader will recognize Julius Metellus in our description—"Seest thou yon imperial vessel, advancing towards us from the gardens of Piso?"

"I see it," replied the maiden, raising her eyes with an earnest and inquiring look to the counte-

nance of her father, and dropping them to the floor as the glance met hers.

"It is advancing in this direction, I think !" he continued, after a moment's pause.

"Nay, father," replied Julia, after a second and more attentive observation, "it rather veers towards the Lucrine lake."

"Art sure, Julia ?" he again asked, "and yet I see it is so. The Emperor comes not hither, then, to-night."

"The Emperor, father !" exclaimed the maiden, with an involuntary shudder—"the gods avert so fatal an omen of evil !"

"Such an occurrence is usually deemed a high honor by those who enjoy the sunshine of the imperial countenance," replied the patrician, with a meaning smile, "why not then by us ? But the topic is both dangerous and unfruitful, though I confess I find relief in the persuasion that we are not to enjoy the expected honor. Come my daughter, let the Judæan bring the lyre, for my soul is weary of the agitating thoughts which have occupied it to-day, and I would fain seek relief in music."

Julia raised to her lips the small pipe of ivory, exquisitely carved, which hung from her girdle, and in answer to her summons, a young female slave glided from behind one of the pillars of the portico, and stood before her with her head slightly bent, and eyes downcast, awaiting her commands.

The dark complexion and oriental features of the girl betrayed an origin remote from Rome; and her soft musical accents, with intonations regularly declining, were pleasing to the ear as she inquired the will of her mistress.

"My lyre, Salome," replied the maiden, with an

air of much kindness, "thou wilt find it in the grotto of Virgil—haste, for it is not often that my father asks for music."

The attendant disappeared almost before the sentence was completed, and as quickly returning, spread the cushions upon the narrow couches of ivory, which ran along the side of the portico, and laid the instrument at Julia's feet. Then retiring a few paces, she took the position she had before occupied.

"Of what shall I sing to you, my father?" inquired the maiden, as her fingers ran lightly over the strings.

"Yonder, Julia," replied the patrician, "is a scene which has inspired many a sweet strain and glowing verse. Hast forgotten the ode in which even Lucan delights, though his own numbers breathe mainly of iron war and of the toils of state?" As he spake, he pointed towards Naples, which now, beneath the uncertain light of the evening, seemed almost to float upon the waves. The maiden understood the allusion, for she presently began to chant the following ode, (if it deserves the name in our unworthy translation) while the music of the lyre became richer and bolder as she proceeded.

P A R T H E N O P E .

I.

She rose from her charm'd sleep,
At the golden break of morn
And her witching lay swept o'er the deep
In tones of gentle scorn :
O'er the azure wave and the sunny shore
It floated sweet and wild,
And the sea-bird's cry was heard no more,
And the seaman's heart grew mild.

II.

Serene 'neath th' orient beams
The fair Campania lay,
Green, as the fairy land of dreams
In fancy's magic ray :
While soft and pure the enchanting light
Bath'd all the lovely scene,
Flashed from the mountain's rock-girt height,
And slept in the vales between.

III.

The Tritons in their shells
Lay list'ning on the shore,
And the Nymphs and Fauns in woods and dells
Entranced, their sports forbore.
By the fountain's side the fair-hair'd Hours,
Seem'd lingering to hear,
And the Titan in his granite towers
Like a pleas'd child bent his ear.

IV.

I will build my fav'rite cell,
In the shade of yonder hill,
And the ocean waves in their roar and swell
Through all the grot shall thrill :
And o'er my living tomb shall rise
A city strong and fair,
With groves and founts 'neath the summer skies
And flowers in the summer air.

V.

Thus ran the siren's song,
And echo on earth and sea
The wild bewitching strain prolong'd
In sweetest melody.
Then from grotto dim, and sacred wood,
The cunning spirits came,
From the rocks and trees their structures hew'd,
And reared the walls of fame.

VI.

In marble courts the flowers
Bloomed in the summer sun,
The myrtle trees 'mid the orange bowers,
Upspringing one by one,

Villas and gorgeous palaces
 Studded the glittering main,
 And gloriously 'mid the spreading trees
 Rose pillar, arch, and fane.

VII.

The siren smiled to see
 The lovely vision rise,
 And she called the place Parthenope,
 - Daughter of fav'ring skies,
 And year by year when the seamen roam
 O'er the waves at dawn of day,
 They seem to hear from her ocean home
 That wild bewitching lay.

The music suddenly ceased, and a heavy sigh from the Judæan, as she rose from her slightly reclining position caused the fair singer to beckon to her to come near. Metellus had advanced to the front of the portico, and was gazing out upon the waters, seemingly lost in thought, for he heeded not the cessation of the music, and his brow was bent in meditation.

"Art unhappy, Salome?" Julia mildly inquired, as the dark and pensive beauty of the slave, heightened by the glittering tears which hung upon her cheek, appealed to her feelings.

"The heart of Salome is in the hand of God," softly replied the Judæan—"he breaketh not the bruised reed."

"But why did you sigh, child, and whence these tears? Surely, the strain I sang was a joyous one. Did it remind you of that early home, of which you sometimes sing, I know, though in a strange tongue?"

"Nay, my mistress, the fleeting emotions of the child of bondage matter little to the high-born Roman maiden. Such music always makes me sad, but I may not tell the cause."

"Sing, then, one of your own mountain songs. Perhaps the ear of my father will be wooed by the strange melody, for I perceive that his brow, notwithstanding voice and lyre of mine, is even gloomier than it is wont to be."

"How shall I sing the songs of Zion in a strange land? The heart of the mountain-bird, my mistress, awakes not but among the branches of his native cedar."

"Salome!" replied the maiden with much interest, and with more enthusiasm than the occasion seemed to prompt. "I would I knew what could make thee happy."

The Judæan started and raised her brilliant tearful eyes to the countenance of her mistress, with an expression in which sorrow, affection and hope were strangely blended, "My happiness, my mistress," she answered, sinking at Julia's feet in obedience to the encouraging gesture of the latter, while her tones increased in energy and sweetness—"my happiness is bound up in thine—my happiness will be complete when thine is secured."

"Then shouldst thou be happy now," replied her mistress, smiling, "for the daughter of Metellus scarcely knows a wish unfulfilled, and she would not rashly inquire what the gods have in store for her."

"There is but one God and father of all," rejoined the slave earnestly, "one Lord over all, one Spirit of good, and thy trust is not reposed in Him. He would gather thee under his wings, as the fowl her tender offspring, and thou shouldst be safe under his feathers; his faithfulness and truth, honored mistress, would be thy shield and buckler."

"Thou hast spoken thus before, Salome. What then is this God whom thou servest with such ex-

clusive devotion. In what land hath his shrine been reared, and what are the offerings which he requires?"

"God," replied the Judæan, "is a spirit, and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. The heart is his temple, and the prayers of his servants will ascend to him from every land beneath the sun."

"Such," said Julia, "is our Jupiter, the father of gods and men."

"Alas, honored mistress!" replied the slave, as in her earnestness, she caught the purple border of the garment which covered her mistress' feet; "I know that thy better spirit must disclaim the foolish and impure fictions of the mythology of Rome. I know that thou dost blush at the worship of such deities as those that reign highest in the Pantheon? And who is there, even of those who are most strenuous for the honor of the gods, that feels not, that in rendering divine homage to fabled characters, whose chief distinction consists in passions beyond the vileness of man, he is debasing his soul! You worship Venus, but what is Venus but the name of all that sin, which destroys the soul, while it seduces the senses. You worship Flora, the Graces, the Muses, and the characters which your most sacred poets ascribe to most of them, would disgrace the meanest maiden upon earth."

"Thou art learned, Salome!" exclaimed Julia, with a look of some surprise, "in the lore of the Romans."

"I speak of that," replied the Judæan, "which mine own ears have heard, which mine own eyes have seen. Campania has been the home of my

youth—I have looked upon the majesty of Rome, and in much of what I know, Julia Metella hath been my instructor; for I have treasured up the words which I have heard in hours of attendance, and thine own chants have taught me much of the faith of the land in which the lot of my bondage hath been cast.

“Wouldst thou then be free, child?” asked Julia, playfully touching with her fan the slight bracelet of iron, which seemed to be the badge of the condition of her attendant.

“The bonds of earthly servitude are light, my mistress,” replied the other, glancing at the emblem, “when we are made free from the slavery of sin. The God of whom I speak to thee, can break the bonds of our evil passions.”

“Art thou then a votary of those dark and mystic superstitions, in which so many seek resort who have deserted the gods!”

“Nay, daughter of Metellus,” replied Salome, “that were a worse bondage still. I rejoice, I trust, in the blessed liberty wherewith Christ has made his people free.”

“Christ, Salome,” replied the maiden, not without an expression of sorrow, mingled with pity, in her countenance. “Thou art, then, a Nazarene. Well mayest thou weep and tremble, child, for I have heard somewhat of that impious and cruel superstition.”

“O, my mistress,” replied the slave, looking up through tears, “Canst thou, too, lend an ear to those absurd reports of the vulgar and ignorant? If I weep, believe me it is not for myself, but for those I love—for thee my mistress. Daughter of Metellus, the young, and beautiful, and high-born, must

die as well as the lowly and the slave, and there is a life beyond the grave which we must all experience in bliss or woe. When death comes, Christ can take away his sting ; when the earth shall be burnt with fire, and the heavens shall roll away, Christ alone can save us then !”

“ Again, again that dream of immortality. Salome, thy words move me strangely sometimes, and I must hear thee speak again of this new, but beautiful faith, beautiful in some of its teachings, but—”

A rustling, as of garments, aroused the attention of the party. On looking up, Julia observed that another person had entered upon the portico, and was already exchanging greetings with her father. He was a young man, whose dress was sufficient to distinguish him as a tribune of the Prætorian guards ; while his manner exhibited the ease and polish of the patrician, blended with the frankness of the soldier.

“ Welcome, Flavius !” exclaimed Metellus, saluting him with great cordiality, “ though the banquet of Piso must miss one of its most honored guests, our entertainment will be all the better.”

There was a cloud upon the brow of the tribune, and a meaning in his eye as he replied,

“ The banquet of the Emperor, noble Metellus, is spiced more highly than with wit of mine. Agrippina hath visited Baïæ—”

“ And gone ?” asked the patrician, in a voice which seemed to come from the inmost recesses of his bosom.

“ Gone within the hour !” he replied, “ but,” adding in a whisper audible to none but him to whom it was addressed, “ there is more beyond”—

and he pointed across the gulf, where the barge, which the patrician and his daughter had been observing, was slowly holding on its way. Then turning to the females, he said gaily,

“Julia Metella, it is long since we have met. I will not say that thy lyre hath charmed my footsteps hither ; but the music at least quickened my pace.”

“Nay, noble tribune,” replied the maiden “my numbers woo not the grim god of war.”

“The more enchanting,” he replied, “because they breathe of the Siren, and Baiæ is a more fitting haunt than the city of Parthenope—”

The remark of the tribune was interrupted by a cry from the distant waters so wild and shrill, that it reached the ears of all upon the portico with terrible distinctness. Flavius started and moved quickly to the side of the patrician, while the maiden sprang from her seat in affright, and the Judæan girl raised her eyes to heaven in silence.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOTHER OF NERO.

— What is't ye do ?
A deed without a name.

MACBETH.

THE waters of the gulf were as calm as before, and the soft hues and brilliant lights of the Italian sky were mirrored upon the almost motionless expanse, as clearly and steadily as on a sea of glass. The faint breeze, which stirred among the olives and vines of the garden, and dallied with the flowers, awoke no billows upon the water, and the low heavy ground-swell beneath, seemed to become more feeble every moment.

The barge had attained a position nearly opposite the villa, when the cry we have mentioned fixed every eye upon its movements. Although convinced by the nature of the interruption that some calamity had befallen her, the observers were at first wholly at a loss to ascertain the nature of the disaster. She seemed completely arrested in her progress, and, to all appearance, disabled from further advance ; once or twice, the crash as of falling timber was heard, and then faint blows of the hammer or axe succeeded, and then the dash of oars, or of something thrown overboard, smote the wave.

"This is some fearful mystery, Flavius!" remarked the patrician, as he bent anxiously over the slight balustrade of iron which ran along the front of the portico—"who ever heard of shipwreck on a sea like that which lies before us?"

"This is worse than shipwreck," replied the tribune—"that bark bears the mother of Nero to Bauli, but it is destined never to reach its haven."

"Sayest thou," said Metellus quickly—"but the unhappy wretches may still be saved, and the Emperor—"

"Wills its destruction," interrupted the tribune, "and the death of Agrippina. It might be dangerous to stand in the way of his revenge."

"Nay, Flavius, that came not from thy heart. Humanity is always worthy of a soldier."

"And resistance to tyranny worthy of a patrician," said the tribune emphatically.

"It is well," replied the patrician, with a meaning look; then raising his voice as he approached the door which communicated with the atrium, "Ho! within there, my Aquarius!—haste Bibo," he added, as the water-manager appeared, "man the barges and haste to the rescue of the passengers on yon perishing vessel."

"Wilt thou go, Flavius?" asked Julia, hastily, as she observed the tribune busied in tightening his girdle.

"I go," he replied, "for these slaves will not know whom or what they seek—"

"Nay, Flavius, but this is unnecessary—yet go," she added with emotion, "for even the mother of Nero should not die the death of a dog."

"Encourage him, honored mistress," said a low voice at her ear, "for I feel that there shall no harm happen unto him."

Julia turned and beheld the countenance of Salome, glowing with a beautiful enthusiasm. The dark lashes which usually concealed the lustrous orbs underneath, were now fully upraised, and the Roman maiden half recoiled at the singular beauty and power of the glance.

It was but a moment, however; then the slave sank submissively to her feet, and bowed her head towards the ground.

"Go then, Flavius," replied Julia, "since my better impulse is thus seconded by one who, at times, might do honor to Cumæ."

In a few moments the light barges of the villa were swiftly skimming the waters in the direction of the distressed vessel, to which we must now transport the reader.

The barge was one which, by the costliness of its materials, and the splendor of its decorations, was sufficiently marked as destined for some special service of the imperial household. Every thing about the prow was seemingly untouched, but the stern, as the boats of the tribune approached, had already sunk to some depth in the water. The heavy deck over the steerage cabin had fallen, and the rent timber and costly furniture lay crushed in one indiscriminate mass. The passengers were hurrying to and fro, some endeavoring to lift the timbers, some vainly tugging at the oars, and all, by their confusion and want of concert, embarrassing each other. Faint cries and groans from beneath, continually rose, and as Flavius drew near, he heard the exclamations of the despairing Agrippina, in tones which chilled his heart with horror.

"Save me, Romans—it is the mother of Nero—the wife of Claudius, who asks for life."

"The mother of Nero asks in vain," said a tall, fierce-looking mariner, springing with tremendous force, on the side of the galley, opposite to that on which the boats were approaching. "Ho, men, it is freedom for which we strive. To a strong swimmer 'tis but a stone's cast to Baiæ—this way, the galley will sink almost by her own weight."

A shout from a portion of the crew responded to this inhuman appeal. The men rushed to the side of the vessel, and vigorously seconded the efforts of the individual above-mentioned, to heave her on one side.

"Slaves," exclaimed the tribune—"and you, Volusius Proculus, beware what you do. All ye," he cried, rising to his utmost height, while the waterman prepared to cast the grappling irons, "all ye who respect the majesty of Roman justice, resist this murder."

"Subrius Flavius!" exclaimed one from the vessel.

"It is the tribune," cried another.

"These are the barges of Julius Metellus," cried a louder voice, which Flavius instantly recognised as that of Agerinus, the freedman of Agrippina.

"Is't thou?" shouted the tribune, "spring forward, Agerinus, and push the slaves overboard, and count upon our rescue! Steadily, steadily;" the irons had taken hold of the guards; "now leap on board all, raise the deck and let the slaves perish in the ruin they have made."

The force which manned the boats of Metellus was fully equal to that which remained on board the galley. Thus encouraged by the tribune, they boarded the vessel, almost as one man, and the heavy deck began to give way before their united

strength. Another cry, more shrill and piercing from the cabin below, was heard in answer to the effort: again they exerted their strength and with more success than before.

"Stand firm, servants of Nero," exclaimed Proculus; "tribune, desist, or this javelin shall find its way to the heart of the victim you seek."

"Forward," shouted the tribune.

The heavy arm of the ruffian descended, as it seemed, with deadly aim. The javelin was forced through the frail gilt wood work of the cabin, and the agonized cry, as of a person severely wounded, followed the crash.

The next moment, the air was darkened with the active form of Bibo who sprang from his place, and grappled with the strong frame of Proculus. The struggle was fierce, but short. Before the comrades of the latter could render assistance, he lost his footing, and they fell together into the sea.

This event terminated the resistance of the mariners to the efforts of the party of the tribune. Discouraged by the loss of their leader, the greater part slunk sullenly away to the benches, while a few leaped overboard and made for the shore.

Thus left in control of the vessel, the humane efforts of the watermen were soon successful. Beneath one of the timbers, the mutilated form of a female, on whom the dagger had plainly begun the work of death, became exposed to view, and the slaves started back in horror.

"The deed is done," exclaimed one, "behold the remains of Agrippina. I myself heard when she called upon Proculus to spare her, and I saw the wood descend from his hand."

"This is not my mistress," shouted Agerinus,

“but the miserable Aceronnia, who to save herself, assumed the name of Agrippina, and has thus perished by her presumption.”

As if in confirmation of his words, another cry was heard from below, in the same tones as those which had before greeted their ears. The corpse was laid aside, and the men began to remove the side of the cabin. A vigorous blow from the axe of Agerinus soon effected an opening, when the whole fabric suddenly fell outward, and a female form sprang into the air, alighted for a moment, with wild gestures, upon the guards, and the next fell backwards into the sea.

“These are friends, my mistress,” exclaimed Agerinus, but his warning came too late. Agrippina, for it was she, had recovered her position, and was making for the shore, notwithstanding the incumbrance of her garments, with singular strength and speed. Under the excitement of the moment, a dozen slaves leaped into the sea, following so closely upon each other, as to threaten the safety of her whom they sought to rescue. Although the mother of Nero ordinarily possessed remarkable coolness and courage in the hour of danger, it was apparent that the protracted agony of her recent situation had so bewildered her faculties and blunted her perception, that she distinguished nothing by eye or ear. It was necessary, therefore, that promptness and energy should be exercised in rescuing her from her perilous situation, and no less so, that the efforts of those engaged should be directed with prudence. The tribune perceived the exigency of the moment, and took his measures accordingly.

“To the boats,” he exclaimed, “some of you

to the boats," for these had been entirely deserted by the slaves.

Agerinus was cleaving the wave with a powerful arm when the order reached his ear, and had already neared the spot where the form of his mistress, evidently outworn by the exertion, and sinking slowly, was visible. Eagerly repeating the suggestion to those behind, he pressed forward, and was almost within reach, when she sank beneath the surface.

Quick as light, the athletic slave plunged after the receding form, while a few of his companions gained the boats and pressed to the spot.

The period of suspense, however, was brief, and happily terminated. First came the bubble and rush of the water to the surface, then a white robe was visible beneath, and then arose the form of Agerinus, his hand firmly grasping the palla or cloak of Agrippina, which was happily so well secured as to bear the unusual pressure.

"Thank the gods," exclaimed Flavius who had been among the first to leave the galley for the scene of action, "she is safe. Gently, friends," and the almost lifeless body was lifted into the boat, followed by the faithful slave, to whom the exertion had cost little beyond the loss of breath.

Fortunately, the experience and resources of one of the principal domestics suggested the proper treatment of the case and supplied the applications which were necessary. It was not, however, until they were within a few rods of the shore, that the patient exhibited any signs of returning consciousness. The first glance into the nature of her own situation, however, served to animate and assure her. After a wild and hurried look on those

around, her eye rested upon Agerinus, and his eager gestures told her of her safety. The tribune stood apart viewing the operations with almost painful interest, pity for the object and disgust at her character struggling together for supremacy in his bosom. At length a troubled expression upon the countenance of the unhappy woman, caused him to advance.

"The danger is past," he said, slightly bowing, "and the Empress is among friends who will care for her safety, or convey her to her own home. Behold the villa of Metellus!"

"Thanks, noble tribune," replied Agrippina, in a feeble voice, with a smile which for once was not hollow or feigned. "After so disastrous a shipwreck, it is a pleasure indeed to feel myself again under the favorable auspices of the Emperor. I would not, however, task my friends too deeply. Bauli is near at hand, and my own slaves await me on the shore of the Lucrine lake."

"If such is your will, madam," said the tribune, who saw the manifest advantage of avoiding exposure by every means which humanity would sanction; "I will leave the barge in charge of these men, who are faithful. Farewell, and may the end of your voyage be more happy than its commencement."

"Farewell, noble Flavius," she answered "and remember that Agrippina is not always ungrateful. You have risked that which is dearer than life in my behalf, and such sacrifices the vilest cannot forget. Should there come a time"—she hesitated—

"Burden not yourself with promises, madam," replied the tribune, almost sternly, for dark remem-

branches were sweeping over his bosom. "I have but done my duty as a servant of the empire. Farewell."

He sprang upon the steps of the portico, and the next moment the barge was gliding swiftly over the waters in the direction of the Lucrine lake.

Julia had retired from the scene, and the words of the patrician and the tribune when they met, were few but full of meaning. With the expression of the generous indignation which they made no effort to suppress, were mingled intimations which might have caused the inhuman tyrant to tremble had he heard them. With the deep, silent night around them, they thought of the insulted majesty of Rome, and breathed to each other the stern regrets of Roman patriotism. Such feelings and words, in men of that mould, do not often pass away into the void without results. But we shall see.

CHAPTER IV.

JULIA AND SALOME.

But I have read thee in our Sacred Book,
His gentle words of love.

——Thou hast! thou hast!
They're stirring in my heart.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

MORE than three hours had passed since the occurrences recorded in the last chapter, and light was still visible in the villa. In a small chamber, whose tessellated pavement, ceiling of fretted ivory, rich hangings of silk, and ivory couches displayed the luxury which had long ago been engrafted upon the simpler manners of the ancient Romans, sat Julia Metella and the young Judæan, engaged in earnest conversation. A lamp of silver hung suspended from the ceiling, raying out through its curtain of gauze, a mystic and uncertain light. In the centre of the cabinet, (for the size of the apartment was such as scarcely to merit another name,) was placed a small reading-stand, on which were displayed two manuscripts; and the highly ornamented recess or receptacle for books upon the wall, seemed to indicate that the place was usually devoted to the pursuits of literature.

Salome sat at the feet of her mistress, holding in her hand a manuscript partly unrolled, on which, during the pause in the conversation, her eyes were fixed.

The shadow of earnest thought lay upon the soft eye and beautiful brow of the Roman maiden. The silence for a few moments continued unbroken, when turning to Salome, she said—

“Read on, Salome, these words, methinks, have a strange power over my mind, and the narrative is beautiful, exceedingly beautiful—”

The manuscript was that of the Gospel of St. Luke, and the passage at which the young reader resumed her task, was that which details the events subsequent to the crucifixion, together with the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

The tones of the reader were faithful in expressing the various changes of sentiment and feeling, in the simple but touching narrative of the Evangelist. As she proceeded, the eloquent tears rolled down her cheek, unheeded by her mistress, who almost wept for sympathy.

“This, then, is the Christian belief—and such was the God of the Nazarenes—” said Julia, with a sigh of gratified curiosity—“and thou believest this, and art happy in thy bonds?”

“Happy, honored mistress,” responded the slave fervently, “in the love of that blessed Redeemer who died for me and rose again. The faith of Salome is weak, and her words are feeble, but there is one at Puteoli, sojourning in the abodes of my people, who hath beheld the glory of the Lord, and on whose lips the gospel is clothed with irresistible power.”

“Of whom speakest thou?”

“Of a Roman citizen, whom divine grace hath raised up to be the herald of the good tidings to the Gentiles. Couldst thou hear him, as I have heard him, thou wouldst learn all the glory and beauty of our faith.”

“I will go, Salome—” exclaimed the maiden with a sudden impulse, “the barges will convey us thither—and the house of Asher, a freed-man of Metellus, hath often received me as a guest. I will go.”

There was a mixed expression of gratitude and fear in the look with which Salome heard this proposal. “Thou wouldst incur, my mistress, the hatred of the populace, perhaps the displeasure of thy father.”

“The people, girl, are nothing to Julia Metella, and my father would but call it a girlish folly. I have a strange desire to learn more of this superstition which hath interested thee so strongly—and if—and if—” she added, “there is an existence beyond the grave, it must be by such purity of heart and life as that book inculcates, that it is to be won. Young and simple as I am, I cannot think that the Jupiter and Venus of our faith can conduct us to immortality. They cannot be immortal that partake so largely of human vileness, and had so ample a share in man’s basest affections. Christ indeed, lived and died like a God, if that volume be true—”

“But” she continued after a pause, in which she seemed lost in thought, while Salome sat with her hands clasped, and her eyes meekly bent upon the earth—“we cannot go till the morrow—the image of that terrible woman whom Flavius rescued from the wave, haunts me even here.”

"Our scriptures teach us," observed the slave, "that the wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and dirt."

"It must be so, girl. There was a hollow agony in the faded countenance, which not even the moment of unlooked for deliverance could do away. The vengeance of the tyrant has failed of its purpose thus far, but when was the doomed one known finally to escape the grasp of Nero? The tribune acted nobly," she continued, as a slight flush mounted to her cheek—"didst thou mark, Salome, the struggle of humanity with disgust, in his speaking features, and the melancholy disdain of his eye, as he avoided the touch of her extended hand?"

The slave raised her eyes to the countenance of her mistress in reply, while a sigh, scarcely audible, escaped her.

"His sudden summons to the presence of Nero," continued Julia, "may argue danger to himself by the refusal of a dreadful service—my father hinted as much."

"The midnight revels of Piso and his friends," remarked the other, "are not wont to be esteemed as fraught with danger. Bacchus is fabled as a jolly god, who admits no fear or peril to mar the mirth of his votaries."

"The tribune is no reveller, girl!" replied her mistress, quickly, "and Nero knows how to choose the hearty companions of his debaucheries. I fear the banquet was but a pretext, for the result of the struggle upon the water must have been known quickly at the villa of Piso."

"Why should my mistress fear," inquired the girl, with great simplicity of manner.

"I know not rightly, Salome, but he who

thwarts, however nobly it may be done, the will of the tyrant, treads on slippery ground."

"And dost thou fear for Flavius, more than for thy father, my mistress?"

The question, simple as it was, called up the eloquent blood to the cheek of the maiden, and it was not without confusion that she replied—

"Nay, Salome, the arm of tyranny cannot reach my father easily, while the tribune of the Prætorian guard moves in an atmosphere of distrust, and is continually exposed to the foul breath of false accusation. We are always fearful for those we esteem. Hast thou never known one, over whose fortunes thy heart is wont to linger with all the sacred interest of friendship?"

"The heart of Salome," replied the slave, "is here where her duty calls it. Heaven I trust will not reject the unworthy offering made to it, and on earth she has none to love but those whose lot is happier than her own."

"I know," said the maiden, "thy devotion to thy benefactors, and thy faithfulness to myself; and my father is not unmindful of thy worth. But the poets tell us that there are dearer ties than those of blood or grateful service."

"The ties of christian love, my mistress, *are* stronger; and, as thou sayest, dearer, than those which link our affections in mere earthly relationships. Such have power to bless us beyond the reach of fate or change."

"Thou remindest me of the beautiful language of Cicero," replied Julia,—"*whence hadst thou the sentiment?*"

"From the records of truth—from the faith to which I cling. When I last visited my father, he told me of one whom he saw in an assembly of

Christians at Jerusalem, not many days after that memorable scene of the day of Pentecost, of which the report has reached your ears. When the rites of prayer were finished, and while the disciples were lingering to receive the parting blessing of those who had known the Redeemer in the days of his flesh, one whose countenance shone like that of an angel, with holy love, stood forth, and spake of the words of Jesus which his own ears had heard, while leaning on his bosom. 'Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye love one another. Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples. If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I speak unto you that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full.' These, my mistress, were the words of Him who laid down his life for sinners, and who rose again that we might live, by the power of his own endless life."

"But have I not heard Salome! that the blood of Jesus of Nazareth, as a profaner of the law of thy people, was shed by thy fathers?"

The slave groaned audibly and then replied,

"Thou hast heard truly, my mistress. But there are some even among our degraded and guilty people whose eyes by grace have been opened, to see in Jesus the true Messiah. Great indeed hath been the guilt of my people according to the flesh, and heavy must be their punishment. I shudder to think of the judgments which even now may be hovering over the holy city and the temple."

"And from whom, child, didst thou receive the first instructions in the religion of Christ?"

"From one, my mistress, who now sleeps in

Jesus ; from one who saw and heard the glorious miracles of Pentecost—from my father.”

“ And what did he tell thee of that scene Salome.”

“ Even what is here recorded,” replied the young christian, “ in the record of the beloved Physician, the companion of Paul.”

She turned to the manuscript beside her, and read the simple but forcible description of the event to which she referred, as contained in that sacred record. It was evident that the interest of her fair auditor increased as she went on, for the flush upon her cheek grew softer yet deeper, and the tender light of her eyes melted through gathering tears. As Salome concluded, Julia laid her hand upon the manuscript, and said with emotion—

“ The God of the Christians is to be worshipped upon the bended knee, with the offerings of the heart. I will kneel with thee, Salome, while thou utterest the words of supplication. Perchance I shall find a blessing.”

In the silence of that secluded chamber, in the sweet, yet fervent tones of the Judæan, was heard the voice of prayer.

“ Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, let the prayer of the weak and the contrite come before thee, and receive an answer at the throne of grace ! Behold, O Lord ! one for whom thou didst die, is seeking, albeit blindly and in doubtfulness, the path of life. Send down thy spirit, Lord, to touch her heart as with living fire—purge her clouded sight, and open her understanding that she may understand thy holy word, and be taught of thee. Spirit of Grace ! take up thine abode in her heart, and lead her into all the truth.”

* * * * *

CHAPTER V.

NERO AT BAIÆ.

Prythee peace,
I dare do all that may become a man.
Who dares do more, is none.

MACBETH.

Chaldeis sed major erit fiducia quicquid
Dixeat Astrologus credent de fonte relatum
Hammonis ; quoniam Delphis oracula cessant
Et genus humanum damnat caligo futuri.

JUV. VI. 533.

THE revel at the villa of Piso had already extended far into the night, but still the sounds of hilarity grew louder and more frequent. In the splendid and spacious triclinium or banqueting hall, the board was spread with the luxurious dessert of fruits and confections : the games had commenced, and the intoxicating wine circulated freely.

Save his host, there were few of patrician rank, or even honorable station, in attendance on the Emperor, on the present occasion. In the vestibule without, lingered five or six soldiers of the Prætorian guard, whose full armour was but slightly concealed beneath the gay embroidered palla or cloak, which constituted one of the chief emblems of their station. Numerous slaves in tunics of grey, edged with pur-

ple, were continually passing and repassing the vestibule, in the discharge of the various duties of office, while the tones of the flute and the lyre, from musicians concealed from view, mingled with the stir of footsteps without, and the sound of voices within.

Occupying a prominent position on the centre of the principal couch at the head of the board, Nero reclined between Piso on the one hand, and Lucan on the other. Among the guests at his right hand, might be distinguished Seneca the philosopher, and the preceptor of Nero; his pale, thoughtful countenance and sober habit according but poorly with the general mirth and splendor of the scene. Opposite to him, reclining between two individuals of less note or rank, was Burrhus, the bold and upright prefect of the Prætorian guards, whose character did honor to the instructions of the philosopher, and to whom he was bound also by the ties of the closest relationship.

The splendor of the hall, and the expensive appointments of the entertainment denoted an age of luxury and effeminacy. From the beautifully paved floor of mosaic, a double row of columns of the purest marble, crowned by Corinthian capitals, rose to the lofty ceiling, which was gorgeously ornamented with paintings and gilt work. The tables were of carved ivory, each covered with cloth of purple and loaded with a heavy service of gold. The couches were of polished wood, adorned with plates of silver, and hung with drapery of embroidered cloth, of imperial purple.

The countenance of the emperor, as seen by the soft lamplight, was anything but indicative of his character. The natural mildness of the expression, had indeed, partly disappeared beneath the traces

of debauchery and uncontrolled passion; but a stranger would have been slow to recognize the tyrant at whose name degenerate Rome had learned to tremble, in the calm, and almost lifeless eye, effeminate aspect, and frail form, before him. A slight flush upon the cheek was strikingly contrasted with the paleness of his countenance, and the thin and almost bloodless lips, about which hovered an expression which might easily change into either a smile or a sneer. A wreath of the wild olive rested lightly upon his forehead, and a slave waited behind him with a lyre, indicating the kind of distinction which, amidst his varying moods, he, at the time, most aspired after.

"Pledge us freely, noble host," he cried, raising a goblet of spiced wine to his lips, "remember that when this night is over, we bid a long farewell to Baie."

"I remember it, august Cæsar," replied Piso, "and in this untasted wine I implore the gods for a quick despatch of the public business, and a speedy return."

He poured the libation upon the board, while his guests bowed their heads in acknowledgment of the piety of the offering.

"The father of his country," said Seneca, with his calm, melancholy smile, which seemed like moonlight faintly illuminating untroubled waters—"the father of his country will, I trust, deign to look in at our poor abode at Pausilippo. We can offer but hermit's fare—"

"Thou givest us that which feeds the soul, my preceptor," interrupted the Emperor, slightly changing his manner, "though the words of wisdom are sometimes lost upon an unworthy pupil."

The moralist bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment, and added,

"The devotees of wisdom should not want patience in their toils, when the reward is so noble, Cæsar! But if I may be allowed to exercise the liberty which your clemency has given me, I would venture to regret that public affairs should call you from the generous feast, in the most genial moment—"

"Nay Seneca," replied Nero somewhat pettishly, as he replaced the goblet—"wisdom may put on her grave aspect too soon. Can we not have one hour with the jolly god—what sayest thou Burrhus, to this unseasonable demand upon our patience?"

"I would say, my lord," replied the person appealed to, with an abrupt decision in his manner, which caused the cheek of Nero to grow pale, "that the exigency of the time demands it."

"Per hercle! sirs—" exclaimed the latter in a sinking voice—"ye would render the imperial purple, a robe of thorns."

"The more precious the drops, then," replied Burrhus, bluntly, "with which the soil of our country is watered, even though they be drawn from the heart."

"By Apollo, man!" replied Nero, laughing, "our heart is gladdened amidst all its cares, when one so rough as thou dalliest with the muses. We must look to our laurels, Lucan," he added, turning to the poet, who sat sipping his goblet with an abstracted air; "the honest Burrhus hath been visited with the divine afflatus, and we have a new competitor in our pleasant toils."

"With such competitors," replied Burrhus, cold-

ly, "I have no desire to contend for the laurel, however strong the enthusiasm which example may at times excite."

Lucan bit his lip in vexation as he replied to the Emperor, whose inordinate vanity digested the doubtful compliment without difficulty,

"The leader of the guards, august Cæsar, "woos a bolder mistress than the retiring muse."

"Sayest thou," exclaimed Nero, abruptly, with a searching look at the prefect, "then the boldest mistress will find him no cold suitor I warrant thee. But come, sirs! a goblet more to our favorable auspices, and then the libation, for we would not neglect the interests of Rome."

The obedient slaves filled the cups, the libation was performed, and Nero arose from his couch, and followed by Seneca and Burrhus, withdrew to a private apartment.

The curtain had no sooner dropt behind their entering footsteps, when the effeminate and careless ease of the Emperor suddenly forsook him. He tottered to a couch, and covering his brow with his hand, seemed to await the revelation of some alarming disaster from the lips of his counsellors.

The moralist was the first to break the silence, and he spake in a deep and almost stern tone, which occasionally betrayed the excitement of his own mind, in spite of the general calmness of his manner.

"Need I tell the Emperor, he said, "that the crisis of his fate has arrived. The foolish contrivance of the galley has ended as I foretold: Agrippina lives, and lives safely, at Bauli."

Nero groaned aloud and sank backwards upon the couch, but made no answer.

"Nay, my lord," said Burrhus, advancing and taking his hand, "this is a weakness unworthy of your cause. Rouse yourself, and let us meet the crisis with firmness."

"Might I rely upon Burrhus," said the Emperor feebly, "I should not know a fear. But how received you the confirmation of this once doubtful rumor?"

"The tribune, Flavius, sent it to me in a scroll concealed among the leaves of the grape."

"To thee," replied Nero, raising his eyes for the first time, to the countenance of the prefect, "and how became Subrius Flavius involved in the matter?"

"The mother of Nero found refuge in his barge while struggling with the wave—"

"By Jupiter," exclaimed the Emperor with sudden and ungovernable rage, "he dies for the presumption—he shall die were he a thousand times tribune."

The soldier retreated a step or two before the tempest of passion, but not in fear. His brow became clouded, and he cast his eye to the ground, while his uncle interposed in the discussion.

"Let us do nothing rashly, Cæsar," he said, "for the ground on which you stand is slippery at best. The slaves of Julius Metellus aided in the rescue."

"Nay, then, all is lost! Surely the fates have cursed me," replied the unhappy prince; "Ere morning all Campania may be roused by the report: and I have no faith in the army. She will reveal all to the senate, she will carry her complaints to the ears of the citizens of Rome. What then, sirs, is to be done? advise me, or leave me to my fate."

Seneca replied not, but fixed his eyes upon Burr-

hus, for he saw the terrible alternative that Agrippina must fall or Nero perish, yet his soul sickened at the idea of the crime which seemed necessary to consummate the safety of the Emperor.

"Darest thou, Burrhus" he at length asked, "commission thy soldiers to complete this fearful business?"

"I would not if I dared," replied the honest soldier, regardless of the appealing look of the Emperor, "such a crime shall never stain the honor of the Prætorian guards, while Burrhus is their leader."

"Away, then, cowardly sycophants," cried Nero, "I can but die, but let me die among friends."

"You do us foul wrong, my prince," replied Burrhus calmly, "but we know how to make allowances for unkind suspicion; if death can prove friendship, name the hazard, and Burrhus will submit to it—but he cannot stoop to so base a crime."

"Is not Agrippina the shame of all virtuous citizens—is she not a curse to Rome," eagerly demanded the distracted Cæsar; for under the influence of his fears, his mood changed with every moment, "he who compasses her fall, brings a blessing upon the empire."

"What the mother of Nero is," responded the prefect calmly, "we all know to our shame, but the baseness of the victim brings no honor to the assassin. And besides all this, my lord, the Prætorian soldiers still respect the memory of Germanicus too highly to spill the blood of his daughter."

"Nero then must seek instruments that will do his pleasure. Do me at least the favor to summon the freedman Anicetus to my presence. Yet stay, Seneca," observing that the moralist made a move—

ment towards the door, "and thou, Burrhus, wilt not leave me yet."

Seneca bowed in acquiescence, and suppressed the painful struggle of his feelings. Scenes like the present were becoming but too familiar in the life of him whom he had endeavored to educate for a nobler career; but he could not yet shake off the fearful responsibility of his office. He shuddered at his own forebodings of the future, and sought vainly, and eventually to his own ruin, to mitigate the torrent of cruelty which he could not control.

The freedman entered with a cautious step, and that air of malicious, determined cunning, which is sometimes found to mark the basest instruments of the basest crimes. He stood submissively at the foot of the couch, while the prefect and the philosopher regarded each other in expressive silence.

"Thou knowest my danger, Anicetus!"—Nero began in the softest tones of his effeminate voice, for the presence of the determined assassin, had calmed his agitation, "thou knowest my danger."

"And can relieve it, Augustus," was the prompt and unqualified response. "The woman whom I hate has escaped the wave; but the sword remains."

"Hearest thou, Burrhus," cried the Emperor, with a levity of manner, which, as contrasted with the abject terror he had recently exhibited, sickened the hearts of those who beheld it. "Thou must be prompt, Anicetus, and bold."

"Have I not ever been so in the service of Nero?" asked the freedman with a smile of self-satisfaction, "Let but my master command it, and

the mistress of Bauli will soon sleep with Claudius."

"Haste, then," exclaimed Nero, springing from his couch and moving swiftly across the chamber, "Fly Anicetus, take with you fit men for the purpose, and consummate all. Your reward shall not be wanting."

"Anicetus asks no reward," replied the assassin with a malicious smile, "But I have forgotten to announce that a messenger from Bauli waits without."

"So soon?" asked the Emperor, "this bodes us no good. Admit him," he added, as he noticed the peculiar expression upon the countenance of the freedman, "Some message doubtless of our dear mother's regard."

As the curtain fell, he turned to his counsellors who stood silently regarding the scene, and asked, with an air of gaiety, slightly crossed by a sneer:

"What think ye, sirs, of a friend like this freedman at need?"

"The instrument," replied Burrhus boldly, but calmly, "is worthy of the deed."

"Mehercule!"—laughed the Emperor, snapping his fingers, "thou art hard upon us, Burrhus. And thou, our grave uncle,—we will not ask whether thy philosophy, by which we yet trust our soul hath profited, would sanction the undertaking; but necessity must know no scruples. Ho, Agerinus! and how fares our worthy mother?"

The messenger made his obeisance with suitable reverence, and then replied in a respectful tone:

"She has arrived safely at Bauli, Augustus, but has been exposed to the extreme dangers of shipwreck by the way. She desires me, however, to

assure you that by the favor of the gods, and the good auspices of the Emperor, she has survived the peril, and now courts the rest and retirement which are necessary to restore her exhausted energies."

"Umph"—retorted Nero, with a short dry cough, and looking doubtfully at Anicetus. "It gives me sincere joy, to receive these auspicious tidings."

"Agrippina, my prince,"—added Agerinus, "was deeply fearful of the effect which the news would have upon her son, the anxiety of whose affection she knows; and therefore, she trusts that he will for the present avoid that interview which his love will doubtless prompt him to seek. She hopes ere long to meet him at Rome, in perfect health and peace."

"May the gods send it,"—responded the Emperor in well-affected solemnity—"but thou wast present at the disaster, Agerinus; tell us how it chanced, for the tale which hath been already brought to our ears is a strange one indeed."

"The crush of the upper deck"—answered the freedman—"was sudden and complete; now how it chanced, we know not, for the air was calm around, and the gulf beneath without a wave."

"Hearest thou, my tutor"—interposed Nero, with an artful appeal to Seneca, the object of which, however, it might have been difficult for the philosopher to understand—"some evil demon hath a pique at us, and would reach our heart through the destruction of our mother. Well, Agerinus?"

"The fall of the deck destroyed Acerronia and Gallus, but the empress escaped unhurt"—continued the messenger: "in her terror she committed

herself to the water, and was nobly rescued by the tribune Flavius, with the slaves of Metellus, the patrician."

"Flavius deserves our gratitude," replied Nero, and we will not be slow in discharging the debt. Did she land at the villa of Metellus?" asked he, vacantly, for his eye was arrested by the movement of Anicetus, who at that moment drew his dagger from his girdle and lifted it on high above the head of the freedman as he stood behind him. Then, as suddenly changing his purpose, he bent to the earth and deposited the weapon silently between the feet of Agerinus.

"Her impatience," answered the freedman, unconscious of the movement, "would not permit her to do so, although much solicited to that effect."

"Treason!" suddenly shouted Anicetus, in a voice of thunder from behind, while he laid a strong hand upon the tunic of Agerinus, "treason august prince! ho, soldiers!" he cried, "the traitor hath sought the life of the most sacred Emperor."

At this bold stroke of villany, the lip of Burrhus curled in proud disdain, while the philosopher recoiled in surprise at the suddenness and cunning of the movement.

"We are wanted here no longer, uncle," said the former, as he passed his arm into that of the philosopher, and led him from the room.

Nero raised his finger in a threatening manner as he caught the parting glance of his preceptor, and in the next moment a party of prætorian soldiers, headed by Flavius the tribune, burst into the apartment.

"Noble Tribune!" exclaimed Anicetus, with

well-acted alarm, "this wretch hath essayed the life of the Emperor."

"Is it so Augustus?" demanded Flavius, as he saluted Nero.

The cold eye of the tyrant dropped before the searching eye of the tribune, and the flush which the previous excitement had brought, left his cheek, while he answered, pointing to the freedman, yet firmly held in the grasp of the unscrupulous assassin—"It is so, tribune!—thou wilt find beneath his robe, nay at his feet, the evidence of his guilt?"

"Bind him, soldiers," cried Anicetus, with a movement which disclosed the dagger at the feet of Agerinus, "I pledge my life to the truth of my assertion, that he drew his dagger upon Nero, incited by the unnatural rage of Agrippina against the life of her son."

The soldiers hesitated, and stood alternately regarding the tribune and the emperor as if expecting further warrant for the seizure.

"Why do ye hesitate soldiers," demanded Nero, with an air of authority, "or does the tribune," he added, with a suspicious glance at Flavius, "doubt the word of Nero?"

At a gesture from Flavius, the soldiers seized Agerinus and hurried him from the room, while the former replied—

"As I saw not the deed, Cæsar, it was but fitting that my soldiers should wait for the command of the Emperor, who did."

"True, Flavius," replied Nero, who felt at that moment the necessity of conciliating the bold and popular soldier before him, "and we interpret the hesitation as but another token of your scrupulous

loyalty. We owe you thanks, noble sir, for the service this evening on the gulf of Baiæ."

"It was but an act of humanity, my prince," answered the tribune, suppressing his indignant emotions, "and I risked nothing in the effort."

"Nero will not forget it, and begs thee to accept this ring as a pledge of his gratitude. And now farewell," he added, rising from his couch, "for we have too long resisted the genial god of sleep."

The tribune and Anicetus left the presence together, the former to nurse the virtuous indignation of a noble heart, the latter to consummate the dastardly and relentless purpose of the Emperor.

The solitude in which Nero was left seemed to bring the speediest and most acute pangs of remorse. Scarcely had the sound of the retreating footsteps died upon the ear, when he fell a prey to those horrors of conscience, from which, in his lonely hours, as Tacitus relates, he was never free. With wild gestures, in which rage, levity, and fear were strangely intermingled, he paced the room of the cabinet, now muttering imprecations upon his mother, now soliciting the favorable regard of his tutor, and then, as if quailing before the stern eye of Burrhus, or the tribune, impotently grasping at the dagger beneath his robe. His cheek was pale, his eye bloodshot, his lip quivered; and the tottering and uncertain footsteps indicated the complete confusion of his faculties. It was not long, however, before a movement in the silken hangings which fell gracefully from the ceiling on the side of the room opposite to that by which his recent visitors had departed, arrested his attention. As if suddenly inspired with hope, or recalled to circumstances

which he had forgotten, he sprang eagerly forward and brushed aside the drapery. A glow of satisfaction passed over his countenance as the opening displayed a female form, guiding into his presence one whose venerable aspect, long silvery beard and oriental dress, were sufficient to designate him as an astrologer.

The form and countenance of the former of these were of that dazzling and imperious beauty, which fitted the possessor to acquire an almost unlimited control over one who was steady in nothing but slavery to the worst passions of human nature. The devout believer in classic fables might have been pardoned if the sudden apparition had startled him into the impression that he beheld Juno descending upon earth, with the obedient Thunderer at her side. Luxuriant curls of glossy auburn clustered over her finely outlined brow and temples, and descended till they mingled with the broad and rich purple fringe of the palla. In her eye there was a haughty sérénity which accorded well with the large and clear expanse of brow, perfect Roman nose, and imperious curl of the lip.

The astrologer seemed to have passed, by many years, the meridian of life; but elasticity was yet visible in his form and mien, and an unrepressed vigor in his large and searching eye.

"Ha, Ibrim!" exclaimed Nero, "I have strangely forgotten thee and thy sacred toils amidst the many cares of state. Doubtless the stars are propitious to Nero, for thou bringest Venus in thy train."

The astrologer bent his eyes meekly to the ground, while she who accompanied him advanced

into the cabinet and raising her finger with affected solemnity, replied :

“ The horoscope has been cast, my prince, and there are promising influences in the house of life.”

“ Nay,” replied Nero, “ I would know what has been the aspect of the stars since the moon went down.”

“ Malignant rays,” replied Ibrim, “ from the region of Sirius, crossed the western quarter as I sat and watched, scarcely three hours ago. But they shortly vanished in the same quarter.”

“ This accords with the fact Poppæa,” replied the Emperor, and in a low tone, apart from the astrologer.

“ The stars are propitious, my prince,” responded the aspiring beauty, while a smile of sinister meaning crossed her haughty features, “ we have no more to fear from the tyranny or the unnatural acts of Agrippina.”

“ A disaster has threatened me, then ?” asked the Emperor, turning to the astrologer with a look in which credulity seemed struggling with suspicion, “ can’st thou tell of what nature.”

“ I cannot, Augustus !” was the brief and prompt reply.

“ But thou can’st read the future ?”

“ I see the promises,” replied the other, “ of a long and glorious reign. Jupiter and Venus in conjunction, and Mars, red and glorious, travelling upwards to the zenith.”

“ The oracle speaks bravely,” said Nero, with a smile of gratification, “ no double meanings here to perplex our poor wits. May I look upon the tablets, venerable Ibrim ?”

The astrologer advanced and spread the tablets upon the couch before the Emperor, who surveyed them with childish curiosity; the exhilarating influence of his thorough belief in the imposition displaying itself in the mingled solemnity and levity of his manner. But we prefer to drop the curtain upon the scene.

Amidst the general irreligion of the Roman world, the voice of the oracles was silent, and the withering neglect of a generation of free-thinkers lay upon the groves and sacred fountains. But the passion which prompts man to look into futurity was as strong as ever in his heart, and in the midst of his contempt for the old modes in which it had been allayed, astrology presented itself with higher pretensions, and soon with complete acceptance. From the days of Julius Cæsar, the astrologers became numerous, not only in Rome itself, but throughout the provinces. The recent decree of banishment by Claudius, had been but feebly enforced, and long before his fall the astrologers had resumed the practice of their art with a publicity which proved how little they feared the prohibition. Under Nero, every superstition which stimulated the guilty ambition and inflamed the passions of men, found a congenial atmosphere; and he himself lent a willing and eager ear to their ravings. Astrology was one of the instruments by which the artful Poppæa was winning her way to power, and the tools which she employed in her work were completely subservient to her purposes.

CHAPTER IV.

PUTEOLI, BY THE WAY-SIDE.

The spirit of grace
Is dealing with thy spirit : be received
A ransomed penitent to the high fellowship
Of all the good and bless'd in earth and heaven.
JOANNA BAILLIE.

PUTEOLI, or the city of wells, was, at the period of our tale, one of the most beautiful and flourishing of the cities of Campania. Vessels and traders from all parts of the Roman world frequented its ports, and its shops displayed the useful products and costly luxuries of every clime. Its suburbs, like those of Naples were crowded with villas of Roman citizens, extending to the gardens of Baïæ on the one hand, and the soft and green declivities of Mount Pausilippo on the other. Here, as hinted in a former chapter, was the favorite country seat of Seneca, not far from which at a considerable elevation arose the humbler, but no less delightful retreat of the mother of Lucan, whither the poet was wont to retire for the prosecution of those pursuits of elegant literature which have preserved to the world the better spirit of that degenerate yet eventful age, and made his own name immortal among men.

The broad and well paved public road which passed through the magnificent artificial grotto of Pausilippo, and swept in a graceful curve along the shore, was bordered on each side by a line of stately forest trees, which afforded a grateful protection from the rays of the sun even at noonday. Fountains and statues gleamed here and there among the groves that stretched from the road side, along the open country, and up the gentle acclivities, and occasionally the princely portico of some patrician mansion, or the front of a temple or public bath, might be distinguished behind the luxuriant foliage. The dark and delicate spires of the mountain pine were richly contrasted with the bright green of the olive and the vine, while nearer the earth, the profusion of gay flowers and blossoms of fruit trees, gave a liveliness and variety to the scene, which no season but an Italian summer, spreads upon the earth.

A morning of singular beauty and freshness had succeeded to the serene loveliness of that eventful night whose general aspect we have endeavored to describe. The sun was yet below the horizon, but the atmosphere was so clear, so brilliant, and withal so balmy, as scarcely to need the light and warmth of the orb of day. The dew hung like clustering diamonds upon every leaf and blade, and the songs of the early birds floated upon the air in those joyous and silvery tones which seemed to indicate that their little hearts were revelling in the rare delights of the scene and the hour.

Beneath the heavily-laden branches of an almond tree on the verge of the city of Puteoli, a female figure occupied, at this early hour, the low block of marble, which seemed once to have served as the

pedestal of some fallen statue. Her dress was that of one in the middle ranks of life, and there was an air of cultivated ease in her deportment and attitude which seemed above her station, while the earnestness with which she applied herself to the perusal of a manuscript in her hand, confirmed the impression of education and intelligence which a spectator might have received from the imperfect glimpse of regular Grecian features, chastened by the traces of thought.

She raised her eyes from the scroll as the sound of approaching footsteps reached her ear, disclosing as she did so, an eye of much brilliancy, and even wildness of expression, which the general calmness of her features could not correct. The fire of a settled and intense enthusiasm was plainly visible in the burning glance, and yet the smile that played about her parted lips was almost as soft and sweet as that of an infant.

In a few moments a turn of the road disclosed to her the forms of Julia of Baiæ and her Judæan attendant, on their way from the western suburb to the gulf where the barge-men of Lateranus were in waiting. A glance of recognition passed between Salome and the stranger, as the latter pointed to the sun which was just rising in the gorgeous east, adding, as she did so, in the Greek tongue, the simple and beautiful morning salutation of the early Christians,

“The Lord is risen!”

“The Lord is risen, indeed,” replied the musical voice of Salome, “and hath appeared unto Simon.”

“Kyrie elëeson!”

“Christe elëeson!”

“And is this,” asked the female, pointing to

Julia, whose simple dress effectually concealed her rank, while her features were but indistinctly seen through the veil which descended almost to her feet, "is this a sister in the faith, Salome?"

"Nay, Epicharis," replied the young Judæan disciple with some hesitation, "she is one who seeks the knowledge which enlightens the mind, but hath not yet been brought to the holy waters of baptism.

"The faith," exclaimed Epicharis, with a glance of such peculiar brilliancy, that it thrilled the very heart of Julia, "the faith which truly informs the mind must touch the heart. Hath she heard the words of the apostle?"

"I have," answered Julia, "I have heard eloquence to which that of Cicero and Lucan, is but lifeless declamation."

"Alas, young dove of the Gentiles!" replied the Greek fervently, "thou hast enjoyed a privilege which Epicharis must not yet seek, but if thou retest with the instrument, the spirit of truth is not yet thine. Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but God must give the increase."

"Discard me not, Epicharis!" answered Julia, in a voice trembling with emotion, "I believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God."

Salome dropt upon her knees at this unexpected confession, and with hands clasped upon her breast, raised her eyes to heaven in mute but eloquent thankfulness. It was beautiful to behold the enthusiasm which enkindled the countenance of one so lovely into something of the aspect of an angel.

"Who is this, Salome?" asked Epicharis, in surprise at the fervor of the Judæan, while the

glow deepened upon her own cheek, at the sound of tones not unfamiliar.

"The distinctions of earthly rank are nothing before the Lord of lords," replied Julia, uncovering her features, the tears yet sparkling upon her cheek, and her soft dark eyes tender with the expression of Christian love, "I am the daughter of Julius Metellus!"

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Epicharis, "thou art then among the first fruits of the high and noble of Rome, as Damaris was of Athens"—

"And thou, Epicharis?" asked Julia, in a tone which discovered how deeply she was interested in the question.

"Ask me not, my sister. I am yet but a poor and feeble catechumen, scarcely daring to aspire to the privileges of the faithful. Epicharis must do much and suffer much for the name of Jesus, before the sacred drops of baptism may touch her brow."

"How?" replied the maiden, as she felt the singular fascination of this woman's presence, and wondering at the effect.

"The deeply sinful, maiden," replied the Greek, looking up to heaven, "must pass through the deepest waters of cleansing. To me, I know a fiery trial is appointed—a baptism of blood—ere the name of the Triune God shall make me one with the Church. But thou, tender and trembling lamb, the fold is open for thee."

"I also," replied Julia, "am but a catechumen, and have not yet received the gift which flows from the laying on of the Apostles' hands—"

"But thou hast heard the words of Paul of Tarsus, maiden?"

"My heart is yet burning with their import," replied Julia.

"Daughter of Metellus," replied the Greek, with great solemnity, "I cannot but hope that the Lord hath chosen thee for great things. Perhaps thou shalt win that glorious crown reserved for so few of our sex."

"My earthly desires are satisfied," replied the maiden, not comprehending the allusion.

"I speak not of an earthly crown, my sister! but of one whose jewels sparkle only on the brow of the redeemed. But the spirit will teach thee all that thou must be and suffer. Search the scriptures, be much in prayer, and the evil one shall not have power to mar the purity of thy faith."

"I feel a happiness," answered the maiden, "which I never knew before. The love of God seems to be shed abroad over all this beautiful earth, and the sweet light of day, the verdant hills, the flowers, the delicious breezes, the birds, I hail them all as the manifold and precious gifts of the Lord of heaven."

"It is a happiness," observed Epicharis, "which none but He can inspire, and of which none but He can deprive thee. Thou wilt be exposed to many temptations, young sister, but his love will prove to thee a fountain of grace and strength, and thy joy shall grow deeper, the more severely thy faith is tried."

The maiden lingered with her attendant in that lovely spot, until the bustle of the awaking city, and the increasing throng which poured in from the suburbs, to the various avocations of toil, traffic or pleasure, caused them to bid farewell to the Greek. The discourse turned upon the words

of the Apostle, and the occurrences at that early assemblage of the Christians, to which Salome had conducted the daughter of the patrician. Divine truth from the lips of Paul had found its way to the heart of the latter, and her mind awoke to the power and beauty of Christianity. Tutored, as she had been from infancy, in the popular mythology, and perfectly familiar with the thousand beautiful associations with which the genius of the best and purest of the Grecian and Roman poets had invested it, the unsatisfying speculations of the recent philosophy, which, while they pretended to inculcate truth by stripping off the gorgeous drapery of the old poetic faith, induced a painful and universal skepticism, had left her mind in that state of darkness and doubt, which, to a young and trusting spirit, is, if possible, worse than the "void inane" of absolute atheism. The tender vigilance of her father had carefully defended her from the influence of those absurd and degrading superstitions in which the vulgar mind seemed so eagerly to seek refuge. The better philosophy of Plato, coldly transmitted as it was in the pages of Cicero, had for a long time offered the only gleams of truth amidst the gloom by which she felt herself encompassed. Immortality had dawned upon her soul, faintly and afar, as a dim but beautiful vision which the murky clouds between seemed ever ready to dispel. Accustomed as she had been to look upon the Christians as but a sect of the fierce and intolerant adherents of the Jewish law, it was not until during her later conferences with Salome, that she had learned the true nature of that religion which proposes to its votaries faith in a divine Redeemer as the only principle of salvation and

pledge of immortality, which offers heaven only to the pure in heart, the self-denying, and the virtuous, and proposes to sustain the spirit amidst the calamities of life and the fears of death, by the glorious spiritual consolations which a God of love imparts. A revelation like this, to her earnest, guileless and trusting spirit, seemed truly as a light from a better world—as a revelation of truth from the celestial fountain of truth. The recent discourse of the Apostle had disclosed to her the nature of sin, the intimate connection between its guilt and the atoning blood of the Redeemer, and the Spirit of God had sealed the convictions which his words had awakened, and along with the wounding of her spirit, brought hope and trust in the salvation provided for the penitent and believing. It was therefore with a calm and thankful heart that she bid farewell to Epicharis, and presently embarked on her return to her father's villa.

As the vessel glided slowly over the waters, her mind dwelt upon the singular character and history of the female she had just left. She now comprehended the secret of that change of conduct and life which in Epicharis had been so thorough and sudden, that to the world it was wholly inexplicable except on the supposition of disgust with life, or alienation of mind. Julia had known her long as the favorite slave of the mother of Lucan, whose native vigor of intellect and rare accomplishments, acquired by the most persevering application to arts for which the nature of her condition allowed her little leisure, had long excited the admiration of all who were accustomed to resort to that favored haunt of the muses. Her faithfulness in servitude gained for her at length

the reward of enfranchisement. Yet, although this was a blessing which, during her servitude, she was known to have longed for most ardently, it seemed to be but feebly valued when actually received, she still remained attached to her former mistress by the willing tenure of affection; nor could the suggestions of ambition, nor the allurements of pleasure induce her to break the connexion. Her views of life seemed to have undergone a complete revolution. Her once unrestrained mirth gave place to habitual seriousness, sometimes to tears, of which none knew the occasion. While a more tender and submissive spirit than that which had characterized her during the period of her servitude, was evident in all her language and deportment—she seemed desirous of seeking retirement from the world, and when necessarily called into society, she studied to avoid the exhibition of those accomplishments by which she had hitherto attracted so large a share of admiration. As Julia thought upon these circumstances she found a convincing evidence of the transforming power of Christianity, while yet there was something almost painfully interesting in the remembrance of her ardent and enthusiastic manner during their interview. The occasional allusions of Epicharis too, to her own lot, only deepened the mystery—and it was with a feeling of bright expectation, chastened by fear, that looked forward to the future, as connected with her own destiny, and that of the remarkable woman whom she could still discern in the distance, perusing her manuscripts by the roadside of Puteoli.

BOOK THE SECOND.

ROME

Thy foster babes are dead,
The men of iron, and the world hath rear'd
Cities from out their sepulchres.

CHILDE HAROLD, IV. 89.

—— Nero made his entry, flushed with the pride of victory over the minds of willing slaves, and proceeded amidst the acclamations of gazing multitudes to the capitol, where he offered thanks to the gods. From that moment he threw off all restraint:

TACITUS, LIB. XIV. 13.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I.

NERO'S RETURN TO ROME.

The sea is white with sails
Innumerable, wafting to the shore
Treasures untold ; the vales, the promontories
A dream of glory ; temples, palaces
Called up as by enchantment, aqueducts
Among the groves and glades rolling along
Rivers on many an arch high over-head
And in the centre, like a burning sun,
The imperial city.

ROGERS.

THE traveller, as he descends Mount Albano, looks with a mingled sensation of admiration and awe upon the wide-spread champaign of Rome, the scene of so many stupendous revolutions, of so much earthly pomp and grandeur, transformed by time and the vicissitudes of human affairs, almost into a desert. While every thing around reminds him that he is looking upon the wreck of a mighty empire, whose gigantic magnificence transcends his powers of conception, his heart sinks under the conviction of the frailty and evanescence of

the most splendid memorials which human ambition has reared to mark its progress and to record its triumphs. It is with a melancholy interest, therefore, that fancy essays to call up the vision of its former splendor, and to re-people the desert and pestilential area with the forms of its departed millions. He looks upon the scanty spots of cultivation interposed between the cheerless expanse of rank grass and wild-flowers, and thinks of the thousand Roman villas, the dwellings of emperors, senators, and nobles, beautifully reposing amidst their parks, pleasure grounds, and gardens, in which the productions of every clime bloomed and ripened with fresh luxuriance. Within the once broad and beautiful amphitheatre of hills and mountains which scarcely served to enclose the ancient city, he looks in vain for the retreats of those noble men, who

Held poverty no evil, no reproach,
Living on little with a cheerful mind,
The Decii, the Fabricii—

of heroes who returned from the conquest of the world to end their days amidst the simplicity and retirement of nature. Amidst the ruins of tombs and aqueducts, the frequent fragments of arches, temples, and splendid edifices, he wanders, vainly endeavoring to discover the reality of that magnificent picture which dawned upon the daily studies, and mingled with the nightly dreams of his youth. Before him indeed rise the Seven Hills; but where is the "eternal city" whose eagles glanced in the rising and setting sun—the city whose extent and splendor furnished no unapt symbol of that vast and wondrous empire, atchieved by the arms, and governed by the wisdom of her citizens?

The ocean hath his chart, the stars their map ;
But Rome is as the desert, where we steer
Stumbling o'er recollections ; now we clap
Our hands and cry " Eureka ! " it is clear—
When but some false mirage of ruin rises near.

Far different, eighteen centuries ago, was the scene which spread itself before the eye of him who approached the metropolis of the world. Then the stupendous amphitheatre was adorned with the proudest trophies of power, wealth and art, and crowded with life. From the smiling gardens and marble structures which scarcely marked the boundaries of the city, beyond its outermost walls, onward over broad and glittering ways, through streets crowded with temples, obelisks, triumphal arches, and kingly structures ; over stupendous aqueducts, by magnificent porticos, baths, theatres and squares, the grandeur and beauty seemed ever increasing, till the capitol arose upon the aching sight as a " burning sun," the centre of majesty and the shrine of power.

Towards noon of a bright and serene day in summer, the unusual throng of citizens in the Campus Martius, and along the Flaminian way, announced that some public spectacle was at hand. Every thing in the general aspect of the streets and public places betokened a day of popular show and pleasure. The tribes from the different wards of the city were gathered upon the Campus Martius, under their respective insignia, while the bands of the Prætorian guards, in full military attire, with polished armor glittering in the sun, were stationed here and there upon the wings of the vast body of the populace. The roads beyond the gates on each side of the Tiber were thronged with multitudes wending their way towards the capitol.

The triumphal pillars, the obelisks, the fronts of the porticos, the statues upon the bridges, the walls, the gates were crowned with flowers, and decorated with gay garlands; while at various places along the Flaminian way, beneath the Porta Triumphalis, and up the ascent to the capitol, rows of scaffolding were erected as if for the performance of some unusual solemnities.

It was the appointed day for the entrance of the emperor into Rome. Nearly a month had elapsed since the events we have attempted to describe, during which, Nero, reeking with the blood of his mother, loitered in the towns of Campania, unable to determine in what manner he should return to the city. The arts of his courtiers, and the obsequiousness of the degraded senate, at length restored his courage, and induced him to traverse the campaign, as a conqueror advancing toward a triumph, which indeed awaited him. The obedient populace seemed actuated by but one feeling of devotion, and the wildest vanity of his heart was satiated by the inordinate homage he received.

Afar off, winding among the recesses of the sacred forests along the Tiber, and at the base of the Alban hills, and echoed on every side from the mountains, pealed the stirring notes of the trumpet, while ever and anon the shouts of the multitude arose in chorus, till the welkin rung with plaudits. Then succeeded the shrill and wild music of the clarion, from the bands gathered within the walls and along the public ways, answered by other joyous bursts from those who occupied the Campus Martius. The women and children were continually occupied in strewing the walks with branches and flowers, and the clear ringing chant of youthful voices sang

of the conqueror's return to the bosom of his people. The altars before the Mausoleum of Augustus, the circus of Statilius Taurus, and the Pantheon, smoked with incense, while the flamens of the respective gods to whom they were dedicated, stood robed upon the steps, with knives in their hands and victims at their side, ready for sacrifice.

Loud and stirring peals of music at length announced that the procession had passed beneath the Flaminian gate, and presently the glowing line was visible to all assembled in the Campus Martius. First came the musicians of various kinds, singing and playing triumphal songs, succeeded by the lictors having their fasces wreathed with laurel, and in their train a glittering throng of musicians and dancers, dressed like Satyrs, and wearing crowns of gold. A company of noble virgins robed in white, their tresses wreathed with the wild olive, and their features partly concealed by the long thin veils of gauze, followed, bearing vases of perfume, which they scattered in the way as they proceeded. Then came the chariot of the Emperor, accompanied by that of Seneca on the right, and the prefect Burrhus, mounted on an Arabian steed, on the left. Glowing with the excitement of the scene, Nero stood erect in the chariot, clothed in a magnificent robe of purple embroidered with gold. On his brow he wore a crown of laurel. In his right hand he held a branch of laurel, and in the left an ivory sceptre surmounted by an eagle. A golden ball containing the sacred amulet hung upon his breast, and as the chariot rolled on, according to the trained movement of the milk-white steeds, he bowed affably to the people on every side, and answered their extravagant gestures of homage with encouraging smiles.

Behind him in the chariot, stood a slave, bearing a golden crown sparkling with gems, who frequently bent and whispered in his ear, "REMEMBER THAT THOU ALSO ART A MAN."

As the procession approached the triumphal gate, the music suddenly ceased, and a new and more imposing element was added to the splendor and grandeur of the scene. Sweeping down from the Capitoline hill, the august body of the senators, led by the consuls, was seen in official robes, and crowned with olive, advancing to meet the imperial chariot. Their greetings were performed in solemn silence, and ere long a flourish of trumpets announced that they had taken their proper place in the procession, which was that immediately behind the emperor. As they took their places, the Prætorian guards closed in behind, and the procession, pouring at length through the arched porticos of the forum, began to ascend to the capitol.

Situated in the highest part of the city, and strongly fortified, the ascent to this lofty and central point in every public display, was by one hundred steps, elaborately adorned on each side by statues and columns. The brazen gates and gilded tiles of the principal edifice, shone gloriously in the meridian sun. This building occupied a square of nearly two hundred feet on every side, and contained three temples, consecrated to Jupiter, Minerva, and Juno. In the middle the temple of Jupiter, *media qui sedet æde* DEUS, reared its imposing structure, with that of the goddess of wisdom on the right, and of the queen of heaven on the left. At various points, also, upon the majestic summit of the hill, arose the smaller structures of the temples of Terminus, and Jupiter Feretrius, and the

cottage of Romulus, covered with straw, near the Curia Calabra.

As had hitherto been customary only on occasion of some regal victories obtained over the enemies of the empire, or on the discovery of dangerous conspiracies, the obsequious senate, when informed of the desire of Nero to return to the city, had decreed that a thanksgiving should be offered in all the temples. As the emperor arrived on the summit of the hill he observed, with a smile of gratified vanity, that preparations had been made for the peculiar solemnities of the Lectisternium. The images of the gods had been taken down from their pedestals and placed upon magnificent couches, around the altars, which were loaded with a profusion of delicacies in services of gold. The image of the Capitoline Jove, alone, occupied its usual majestic position, before which stood the Pontifex Maximus in his official robes, surrounded by his attendant priests. In the midst of these, unconfined, and seemingly at liberty, stood the animal to be sacrificed, adorned with fillets and garlands, and a small crown pendant from the tip of each gilded horn.

The imperial chariot paused in front of the temple of Terminus; the senators, leaving the procession, arranged themselves within the portico of the Capitolium, while the lictors proclaimed silence.

From the centre of the group, the Consul advanced, and taking his position between the image and the altar, began in a loud voice to declare the occasion of this public and joyous thanksgiving.

“The life of the most sacred Emperor,” he proclaimed, “has been in danger from the malicious arts of the enemies of Rome. Agerinus, the freedman of Agrippina and of all her creatures the

highest in her confidence, gained access to his cabinet armed with a poniard : but the gods having enabled his faithful servants to detect the conspiracy, with the same spirit which planned the murder of her son, she speedily despatched herself, when the tidings reached her ears. The Roman people are well aware of the crimes of this miserable woman. They know that her ambition aimed at a share in the imperial power, and that she obliged the Prætorian bands to take an oath of fidelity to her. The senate and the people were to submit to the same indignity, and bear the yoke of female tyranny. Seeing her schemes defeated, she became an enemy to the fathers, to the soldiers, and the whole community. She neither suffered a donation to be distributed to the army, nor a largess to the populace. At her instigation prosecutions were set on foot against the best and most illustrious men in Rome. If she did not enter the senate and give audience to the ambassadors of foreign nations, all present well recollect how that disgrace was prevented."

"Who remembers not," he continued, "the crimes which she perpetrated during the reign of Claudius? We shudder yet at the enormities of that period; but Agrippina was the cause of all. Her death, therefore, is an event in which the good fortune of the empire is signally displayed. By a decree of the senate, therefore, you are assembled together, citizens of Rome, to offer up thanksgivings for the defeat of the machinations of this guilty woman, and for the safety of the Emperor and of the empire."

As the consul proceeded in this harangue, Nero, assisted by the slaves of his household, who followed his chariot, threw off the imperial garments

and appeared in a tunic of pure white. At a gesture from the Pontifex Maximus, he advanced and stood before the altar while the popæ brought forward the victim for the sacrifice. Amidst a solemn and impressive silence, the salted cake was sprinkled upon the head of the beast, and the frankincense and wine poured between its horns. The sacred hairs, as the first fruits of the offering, were plucked out and thrown into the fire—the victim was struck with the axe, and stabbed with knives, and the blood collected in goblets of gold, poured upon the altar. Then the augurs advanced, and having inspected the entrails, declared that the signs were favorable, and that the sacrifice of Nero was acceptable. The flames upon the altar soon consumed the parts of the victim consecrated to the gods—and the prayers of the pontifex, followed by the libation, announced that the ceremony was concluded, when the body of the people silently retired to their respective quarters.

The festivities which followed were greatly in contrast with the solemnities of a scene, which although viewed by all rather as one of the customary mummeries of a religion whose only worth or significance consisted in its connection with the state, was not without a degree of impressiveness for the popular mind. Whatever awe the enactments might have left, however, upon the minds of those that remained, was speedily dispelled by the unbridled levity of the Emperor, and his attendants, and the scenes of riot and revel in which even the most venerable of the senators seemed to hold it no disgrace to plunge.

With a thoughtful brow, the tribune, Flavius, continued to occupy his allotted post, before the temple of Juno, until the sound of the trumpet an-

nounced the welcome period of his release from duty. Gathering his military cloak around him, he quickly descended the broad steps of the capitol and shaped his course by a private street towards his quarters at the base of the Viminal hill. It seemed, however, that his movements had not been unobserved, for, presently, a female form clad in the usual garb of a Roman matron, with features closely veiled, emerged from the shadow of a pillar, and followed with swift, but almost noiseless footsteps, in the same direction.

Absorbed in the proud and melancholy reflections which the scenes of the day had excited, and disgusted with the part which he himself had been compelled to take in the public approval of a crime at which his soul revolted, he slackened his pace as he drew near the camp, and it was not until after the lapse of a considerable interval, that he became conscious of the vicinity of another person. The rustling of garments once or twice caught his ear without arresting his step. At length, however, the distinct mention of his name, in a low but firm voice, caused him to turn quickly and look upon the woman.

"Who seeks Flavius?" he inquired, as he gazed with some interest upon the closely veiled figure before him.

"One who seeks him for purposes of good, for she comes to warn him of danger."

"I live in an atmosphere of danger," he replied, "and if thou can'st not tell me how it is to be avoided, thy kindness may prove of little value."

"Such information is within my power, tribune!"

"And who art thou," he asked, "in whose bosom the fate of one unknown to you excites so much interest?"

"Who I am?" she replied, in measured and somewhat melancholy tones, "it boots not now to ask. Suffice it to say, that I have the power and the will to serve thee. Thou wast among those who vainly rescued the unhappy Agrippina from that death which unnatural rage brought upon her in another form. Thou hast enemies—enemies in high places of power."

"Such enmity, woman," replied Flavius, "I regard not, for the gods protect their own. If thou hast no more to say, withdraw and let me pass on."

"They aim to strike the first blow at those who are dearer to thee than thine own life; but with such cunning that thou shalt not be able to see whence the blow descends."

"If thou hast aught to reveal, say on," he added, impatiently, but with awakened interest, as the mysterious stranger hesitated.

"Hear then, and as thou hearest, prosper. Ere many days a murderous blow will be aimed at the life of Julius Metellus, and through him, at the honor of his daughter. The former consul is one whom Nero both hates and fears; and the beauty of Julia of Baïæ yet lives in the memory of Tigellinus."

There was enough in the recent transactions of the abandoned court of the emperor, as revealed to Flavius during his own residence at Baïæ, to give weight to insinuations of this nature. As he heard, his memory rapidly ran over the circumstances which had already fallen under his notice, and he felt, not without a thrill of apprehension, that there was much to warrant suspicion and incite to vigilance.

"Thou mayest not know, at least not yet," continued the female, "the name of her who thus

warns thee, but she asks not thy belief without proof of what she says. There is a grove which skirts the Appian way, near the tomb of Cæcilia Metella. If thou wilt meet me there when the moon-beams first silver the towers of the capitol, thou shalt know all that a brave man needs to know when danger threatens. The approach by the Nævian gate will be secure and safe from observation."

"And how shall I know" replied the tribune, again surveying the figure before him with a scrutinizing glance, "that thou art not trifling with my credulity."

"I leave no pledge, tribune," replied the woman firmly, "nor will I offer any guarantee of my truth. If thou feelest the object to be worth thy endeavor thou wilt risk the chance of deception. Farewell."

Ere Flavius could reply, the figure had departed from his side, and turning the corner of one of the narrow streets, was soon obscured by the shadows which, owing to the size and closeness of the buildings, always enveloped some of the less elevated parts of the city even at noon-day. Impressed, in spite of himself, with the manner and import of the communication made to him, he lingered irresolute, till the last gleam of her robes vanished in the distance, and the increasing throng of the soldiers and populace recalled him to himself.

"Strange," thought he, as he proceeded on his way, "that the warning of this woman accords so well with the fears that have weighed upon my own mind during all the transactions of this day. There was, in truth, that in the greeting with which Nero received Metellus, which boded dark designs and concealed malice. I will go."

The return of Julius Metellus to the city had preceded that of the Emperor by some days, during which, his election to the consulship had been proposed. While his known patriotism and integrity, thoroughly tested during his administration of the inferior offices of quæstor, edile, and prætor, served to animate the hopes of many with the prospect of some relief from the tyranny and corruption of the court, it was more than suspected that the emperor secretly entertained towards him that hatred with which he had long since begun to regard every thing in the semblance of public virtue. Nero was well aware also that the acquaintance of Metellus with many of his darkest and most disgusting crimes, might prove dangerous in the event of a decline of the popular favor. The tale which ascribed the attempted destruction of Agrippina by shipwreck to accident, was known to be false; but the humor of the public mind, disgusted with her long and unblushing career of crime, and looking forward to a period of unrestrained license and amusement under the administration of her son, was as yet rather disposed to applaud than to condemn her murder. But the fears of Nero, awakened by the risings of an evil conscience, could know no rest so long as those of such consequence and influence as Metellus, or the prefect and tribunes of his guard had it in their power to stir up the people by palpable proof of his wickedness.

As the mind of Flavius dwelt upon these things, his thoughts fastened with an interest of a more tender and melancholy nature, on the defenceless situation to which the beautiful daughter of Metellus must inevitably be exposed in the event of a successful conspiracy against the life of her

father. He knew of the danger to which the bold admiration of the court favorite, Tigellinus, had more than once exposed her, and the brief but alarming insinuation of the woman who had so strangely crossed his path, served at once to disclose all the hazards to which the unscrupulous but secret machinations of such a monster might give rise. In his own bosom he had nourished hopes and aspirations to which, in the sweet self-delusion which ever marks the rise of sincere and virtuous love, he had scarcely yet dared to give a name. The image of Julia of Baiæ was as a vision of almost more than mortal beauty and purity to his soul; it mingled with his daily thoughts and dawned upon his dreams. And these feelings, while they served to preserve him from the influences of the impure and demoralizing atmosphere of the city and court, impelled him to a more thorough and conscientious discharge of his duties as a citizen and a soldier. The sympathies which attract lofty and generous minds towards each other, had established between him and the prefect, Burrhus, the closest friendship. Aware of the regard which that officer cherished towards Metellus, and being well assured of his zealous coöperation in the event of danger toward the latter, his first impulse was to seek the prefect and breathe his own suspicions in his ear. But the reflection that he as yet knew nothing of the threatened evil, soon corrected this resolve, and he determined to await the revelations which the night might bring to him.

The heart of the tribune rose with professional pride as he emerged from the arches of the Forum of Augustus, and soon beheld before him the broad and well ordered camp of the Prætorian guards, reposing

upon the level and fortified area between the Viminal and Quirinal hills. Snowy tents and broad silken banners were rustling in the breeze; the eagles upon the lofty standards seemed floating in air, above the thousand points of glittering steel, from the stacked arms of the infantry, and the brilliant caparisons of the cavalry, all burnished by the sunlight. The broad open space between the tents and the ramparts seemed deserted, save by here and there a single sentinel pacing his regular and monotonous round in the shadow of the fortifications which enclosed the camp, composed of palisades strongly and intricately secured by iron bands; and defended by a ditch of the usual depth and width of twelve feet. In the midst of the quadrangle formed by the tents, arose the Prætorium or General's quarters, sufficiently designated by its superior height and the broad eagle, which, as the emblem of the power of the empire, rested upon the standard that arose from its midst. Although many forms were seen moving in the inner streets, or darkening the doors of the tents, no sound arose to break upon the stillness of the scene. The step of the sentinels was noiseless on the soft grass, and the horses were feeding quietly at their stations.

Presently the sound of a trumpet from the quarter of the capitol aroused the tribune from his momentary reverie, and turning quickly, he noticed that the last of those bands who had been stationed along the Campus Martius during the solemnities of the day, were returning to their quarters. The prefect led the troop, as with military precision, and spears in rest, they paced the well-paved streets. The tribune retained his position, until

a gesture from Burrhus induced him to assume a station by the side of the latter, and they proceeded in silence to the camp. As they drew near, the low and prolonged notes of the trumpet in the vicinity of the Prætorium arose upon the air, followed almost instantly by the gathering of the cohorts, with glittering arms and banners displayed in every street of the camp. And as the returning party passed within the ramparts, it was beautiful to behold with what celerity and order the troops marshalled themselves in their respective ranks—how brightly their arms shone in the declining sun, how silently the disciplined movements of that living mass were performed. No hurry in the dense and serried ranks—no jostling of band with band, no clashing of armor upon armor. The very footfalls were silent upon the grass, and the scarcely audible martial tramp, to a superstitious ear, might have seemed like the tramp of the dead on the the shores of the fatal river.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAKE OF AGRIPPA.

“Have you not cloven feet? are you not devils,
Dare any say so much, or dare I hear it
Without a virtuous and religious anger?
Now to put on a virgin modesty
Or maiden silence when his power is questioned,
That is omnipotent, were a greater crime,
Than in a bad cause to be imprudent.
Your gods! your temples! brothel houses rather,
Or wicked actions of the worst of men
Pursued and practised. Your religious rites!
O, call them rather juggling mysteries,
The baits and nets of hell; your souls the prey
For which the devil angles; your false pleasures
A steep descent by which you headlong fall
Into eternal torments.

MASSINGER.

TIBERIUS, abandoned and shameless as he was, sought to hide himself, his vices, and sensualities amidst the rocks of Capreæ. But Nero seemed to take a fiendish delight in exposing his execrable wickedness to the light of open day. No sooner was he relieved from the dread of the designs of Agrippina, than he gave a loose rein to the meanest and most vicious passions. During the few years of his cruel and licentious reign, the capital was transformed into a scene of universal dissipa-

tion, riot and debauchery. Neither rank, nor age, nor civil honors, furnished an exception. All degrees embraced the theatrical art, and, with emulation, became the rivals of Greek and Roman mimicry; proud to languish at the soft cadence of effeminate voices, and to catch the graces of wanton deportment. Persons of rank studied the worst characters. In the grove planted around the lake where Augustus gave his naval engagement, booths and places of recreation were erected to pamper luxury and inflame the passions. By the prince's order, sums of money were distributed. Good men, through motives of fear, accepted the donation, and to the profligate, whatever ministered to sensuality was sure to be acceptable.

The manners, says Tacitus, had long before this fallen into degeneracy, but in these new assemblies, a torrent of vice bore down everything beyond the example of former ages. Even in better days, when science and the liberal arts had not entirely lost their influence, virtue and modesty could scarcely maintain their post; but in an age that openly professed every species of depravity, what stand could be made by truth, by innocence, or by modest merit? The general corruption encouraged Nero to throw off all restraint. He mounted the stage and became a public performer for the amusement of the people. With his harp in his hand he entered the scene; he tuned the chords with a graceful air, and with delicate flourishes gave a prelude to his art. He stood in the circle of his friends, a Prætorian cohort on guard, and the tribunes and centurions near his person. The tribe of sycophants assumed airs of grandeur, swelling with self-importance, as if they were all rising to preferment by their genius or their virtues.

A quiet summer evening had succeeded to the excitement and bustle of the day; the sky was cloudless and bright with stars, but without the moon, whose crescent outline was as yet scarcely visible through the deep red of the horizon. The religious festivities on the Capitoline hill had ended at sunset, and the public places so recently thronged with life and splendor, were now nearly deserted. It was in fact that interval of repose which those who, like the Romans, spend the greater part of the day and night abroad, find it necessary to recruit the energies exhausted by one round of entertainments, for the enjoyment of the different, though no less welcome excitements of another.

One quarter of the city, however, presented an exception to the general silence and repose. As the shadows of the evening fell upon the scene, the bustle of preparation that proceeded from the neighborhood of the Pantheon of Agrippa, and the frequent lights flashing through the dense and lofty groves that encompassed the lake, betokened the spot chosen for the revelries of the night. A cohort of the Prætorian guard was already in waiting at the Triumphal gate, whose special duty seemed to consist in preventing the premature visits of the more anxious or less weary of the populace to this attractive suburb.

As the hour wore on, the streets became animated with groups of citizens in the same gay attire which they had worn during the day. Now and then a superb chariot, belonging to some individual of the more privileged orders, rolled through the closely marshalled ranks, or the retinue of some noble proceeding on foot, and ushered by torchbearers, glided swiftly but silently along the gentle descent in the direction of the lake.

Among those whom business or leisure summoned thus early to the scene of the festivities, was one who, to all appearance, was privileged with an exemption from the rules to which the populace were subjected; for he enjoyed at pleasure, the liberty of egress, and was observed continually flitting to and fro in the vicinity of the gate, with no very definite course, and seemingly without object. His dress, of coarse materials and uncouth fashion, was partly civic and partly military, while the polished flute, suspended from his girdle, the gay Babylonian sandals, and above all, the tablets and stylus partly visible between the folds of his vest, indicated a singular combination in one individual, of offices and accomplishments usually distinct.

The movements of this individual, although they excited little attention from the soldiers, seemed to afford matter of much interest to the groups of citizens who loitered within the walls. Those most remote from the gate gathered into little circles as he passed, and by whispers and significant gestures, as levity or a deeper emotion prompted, communicated their impressions to each other. In one of these groups, however, the interest which he excited seemed to be of a more permanent nature than that which mere curiosity or love of gossip is found to prompt. Three individuals, enveloped in sable cloaks, which might have been assumed either for show or disguise, were gathered around the base of a statue of Jupiter Ultor, whose colossal proportions projected a deep shadow towards the quarter occupied by the guards, enabling those within to observe freely the motions of the passers-by, while they themselves were comparatively concealed from observation.

"The spies of the Emperor are already at work," observed one of the individuals thus alluded to, in a low voice, to his companions, "one can hardly mistake the object of all this unusual activity in yonder fantastic servitor of his pleasures and humors. What thinkest thou Vespasian?"

"His object or movements matter little to me, noble Flavius," replied the person addressed, "and little I should think to thee, except perhaps in the just indignation which must arise in a soldier's breast, as he witnesses the practice of such unworthy arts. But thou knowest the man?"

"The barber of Naples," replied Flavius, "cannot change his ill-favored features as readily as his garb. But I marvel somewhat as to the special nature of his attentions here this evening."

"Who leads the cohort?" abruptly demanded Vespasian.

"Statilius Quadratus," replied the tribune, "as thou may'st see by the aspect of the ranks."

"Then I can echo thy suspicions with all my heart. Was this appointment by the order of the Emperor?"

"Of Nero, I presume," replied Flavius, "although Tigellinus was the channel through which it reached the Prætorium."

"Nay, then," answered the centurion, "I cry you mercy, Flavius. Never did good come out of such a combination. But mark—per hercle! the barber is not lacking in gallantry, whatever may be the amount of his general qualifications."

As Flavius turned his eyes in the direction indicated by the centurion, a singular spectacle presented itself to his view. A tall figure, clad in the robes of a female, the materials and adorn-

ments of which were of unusual splendor, was seen descending from the steps of a superb chariot, on which, in several places, the imperial insignia were emblazoned. On one side of this principal figure, he discerned the stately form and grave, melancholy features of Seneca, the painful expression of which was scarcely at all concealed beneath the half-drawn hood of his cloak, and the high collar attached to the tunic. On the other side, the erect frame, and haughty but noble countenance of Burrhus was visible, his brow firmly contracted, and his eye bent with a stern expression upon the evolutions of the soldiers of the cohort, who had moved from their former position, and were now silently arranging themselves on either side of the chariot.

"The emperor!" exclaimed Flavius in a tone, in which surprise, indignation and contempt seemed struggling together for expression.

"Such as the gods have sent us," replied the centurion.

"If there are gods in Rome," muttered Flavius, "they must avenge this degradation! I am tempted to cleave the heart of this disgusting wretch even where he stands."

"Speak lower, Flavius!" replied the centurion with difficulty suppressing his own emotions, as he grasped the hand of the tribune in sympathy. "The time for that work is not yet come. And thou, Sulpicius Asper," he continued, as the glance of another individual of the party met his own, "remember that the time is not yet come!"

"The time *must* come, ere long, Vespasian!" replied the person addressed, "or this heart of mine will burst with vexation. A Roman soldier cannot

bring himself to look often on such a scene. The very marble frowns upon it, and did I not know that there are brave men and true, whose wisdom better fits them for discerning the time than my own, Jupiter Ultor should not long be without his bolt."

Vespasian smiled in approval of the enthusiasm of his colleague, as he withdrew his eye from the haughty and frowning features of the statue that rose above them, and then cautioning silence, by an expressive gesture, again directed the attention of his companions to the scene before them.

Other personages had been added to the imperial party, among whom Flavius recognized Metellus, and the favorite, Tigellinus. So far from shunning publicity, or avoiding the general observation in the disgraceful disguise he had assumed, Nero proceeded onwards through the silent ranks of the cohort, with a mincing and affected step, while, on the outside of the throng, the chariot moved on at a slow pace, in which sat the haughty and beautiful Poppæa unveiled before the multitude, but to all appearance, disregarding of their presence.

While the eyes of the tribune were yet fixed in indignant scorn on the retiring procession, he was suddenly started by a gentle touch upon his gloved hand, and a voice whispering in his ear, "Remember the place and the hour; if thou wouldst serve Julius Metellus: seek not to distinguish my form in the crowd, and above all attempt not to follow me; beware of the barber of Naples, for his eye is upon you with a fell design."

The tribune, as he heard these last words, checked the impulse by which he was at first inclined to confront and detain the speaker. On

changing his position with a more cautious movement, he observed that the individual was completely lost in the crowd. The attention of his companions had been so entirely concentrated upon the scene before them, that none but he was aware of the mysterious interruption. The next moment served to convince him that the intimations of the woman, in one point at least, were worthy of confidence. The individual alluded to, had left the retinue of the Emperor, and was approaching his own party with a light, silent step. As he drew near, he saluted the officers with the air of one who was sure of the parties with whom he communicated, and observed, in a voice whose low and occasionally hissing intonations were anything but grateful to the ear—

“Ye will miss the pageant, citizens of Rome, and the Emperor cannot lack the presence of his friends.”

“The humble seek retirement, sage Syphax,” said one in the garb of a citizen, as he passed, “we follow on according to our degree.”

“True, Annulus,” responded Syphax, answering the unsought greeting with a knowing smile, intended for the party of the tribune, “but the auspices of this night proclaim all modesty a crime. The most sacred emperor woos the meanest to his embraces and his confidence.”

“The people will doubtless profit by the favor,” rejoined Sulpicius Asper, in a bold voice—“the love of the Emperor is known to be as the last gift of the gods to oppressed mortals—”

“And what is that, friend?” inquired Syphax.

“Elysium, man!” replied Asper, “dost read the poets?”

Syphax nodded approvingly, and cast a scruti-

nizing glance over the whole group, until his eye settled steadily upon the countenance of the tribune. An expression of malignant cunning inwardly congratulating itself upon the detection of its object, crossed his sinister features for a moment, and his fingers seemed to move, as if unconsciously, towards the stylus which projected from between the folds of his vest. Then, as if his object was accomplished, he made a careless gesture of farewell, and was soon lost among the throng that was pouring through the ample arch of the gate.

Prompted by a sense of duty or the desire of diversion, the officers followed in the same direction. The front of the Pantheon arose in the distance in the midst of a brilliant circle of light, and the beautiful outline of the temple, the light Augustan portico and the groves, was distinctly traced upon the horizon, yet crimsoned with the lingering hues of the sunset. The surface of the lake at length opened upon their view through the vistas of the trees, and as they entered the deep shadow projected by the outer circles of the trees, a scene of dazzling splendor was presented, such as only the licentious prodigality of the court of Nero could have called into existence.

Upon the bosom of the lake, towards the richly adorned and cultivated shore on which the Pantheon was erected, floated a platform of prodigious size, supported at a slight elevation, and capable of being moved to and fro upon the water, by a number of boats superbly decorated with gold and ivory. On this platform, covered throughout by the richest carpets of Persia, were erected tables and couches, as if in preparation for a feast; the

former loaded with a profusion of golden plate, the latter decorated with drapery of imperial purple, which presented a striking contrast to the delicate ivory and silver material on which it was hung. In the centre was erected a sort of stage, adorned after the same fashion, around which a number of musicians were observed with their respective instruments, arranged on each side of the throne or chair of state, if such it might be called, which by its trappings, was evidently designed for the Emperor.

A row of booths decorated with curtains of silk and festooned with flowers, lined the shore in its whole extent, but they were as yet unoccupied save by those soldiers of the guards whose duty it was to prevent the intrusion of improper persons. Beyond these were discerned the gay groups of the populace in continual agitation, as curiosity or love of change prompted their movements.

The sound of a trumpet from the Augustan portico, at length announced that the principal actors in the expected entertainment were about to assume their stations. A thousand lights, as if by magic, suddenly blazed along the front of the portico, and on every roof and tower of the stately mansion of Agrippa beyond. The richly carved vases of ivory containing fragrant oils which were placed at frequent intervals between the drapery of the booths, were lit up by the torches of a crowd of nymphs gliding simultaneously from their coverts, as the musicians answered the appointed signal by a spirited prelude. Ushered upon the stage by Tigellinus on the one hand and Poppæa on the other, Nero appeared in the garb of a woman, and receiving the golden lyre which a slave presented

with bended knee, took his seat amidst the shouts of the spectators.

Then succeeded the usual disgusting farce of solicitations from the populace that the Emperor would afford to them the entertainment which his talents qualified him to give, followed by all the mock humility and parade of affectation, the half uttered excuse which they knew to be as a command to renew their entreaties—and the seemingly reluctant compliance, at the last. From the minutest detail of this scene, the peculiar province of our tale happily excuses us, and we turn with pleasure to pursue the fortunes of one in some degree worthy of our sympathies.

The party of the tribune, as it came within view of the spectacle upon the lake, sought a retired position within the grove, beyond the gay circle of the booths, and as the pageant proceeded, seemed desirous to avoid all participation in the applauses which arose continually from the excited crowd. Flavius looked upon the varied display with a vacant eye, until the sudden appearance of Nero upon the platform, vividly recalled to his mind the appointment to which a few hours would call him, and the warning he had received. Wearied with the exercises of the day, and careless of exhibiting his contempt for the base arts to which the Emperor degraded himself, Vespasian reclined at ease upon one of the rustic seats spread for the accommodation of the spectators, while Sulpicius Asper stood at hand with a clouded brow and curling lip, scanning the silent ranks of the cohort which were now marshalled under their leader upon the opposite shore.

“Thou hast marvellous little humor for the

music with which the Emperor favors us, Asper," remarked Vespasian, as a flourish of more than ordinary merit drew forth unusual thunders of applause from the crowd—"This is the very rage of mortals inspired by the muses—"

"I might add a strain," replied the centurion, "not altogether in harmony, had I the command of yonder burly trumpeter. One good blast might, even here, lead to deeds which would eclipse the Ides of March."

"By Jupiter, Asper, but this rash humor of thine will ruin us all," replied Vespasian in a low and emphatic tone.

"Nay, if I am rash," responded the centurion in a more subdued manner, "my excuse must be sought in the provocation."

"*Tantæne animis cœlestibus iræ?*" said a voice close to the ear of the centurion, "surely, brave centurion, thy words are all but prophetic."

"Prophetic to thee, at least, base slave," responded Asper in obedience to an impulse too powerful and sudden for him to resist. In another moment the polished steel of his dagger flashed in the air, and the weapon descended like lightning into the heart of the intruder.

Syphax, for it was he, fell to the earth without a groan or even a struggle. The work of death had been instantaneous. The features, as he fell, writhed in a fearful expression of hate and disappointed malice, and the red dilated eye glared horribly upon his murderer.

"Fool," exclaimed Vespasian, starting from his seat, and seizing the centurion by the arm, "what hast thou done?"

"Sent a knave to Orcus before his time," re-

plied the excited Asper, spurning the corse with his foot with such vehemence, that it rolled down the gentle declivity under some of the unoccupied seats below, "let him practice his accursed trade there, if he can find employers base enough."

"Away" replied Vespasian, "the deed was a rash one, but I cannot find it in my heart to reproach thee. Away, Flavius," he added, as the tribune, thoroughly roused by the suddenness of the occurrence, was about to ask an explanation of what in fact had transpired while his attention was absorbed upon the scene beyond, "ask no questions, but follow."

At that instant, a figure closely enveloped in the circular cloak and hood so commonly adopted by the Romans both for purposes of protection from the inclement air and for concealment, passed hastily through the group, as if by accident, and whispered in the ear of the tribune—

"Away—but secure the scroll at the centurion's feet."

Again warned in the same mysterious manner, the tribune eagerly turned in the direction of the voice, but the figure had already mingled with the crowd before them. Happily for his party, the interest of the populace in the fête at the moment of the fall of Syphax, was such as entirely to absorb their attention: it had been witnessed, as it seemed, but by one individual of the whole throng, and that individual was evidently friendly.

Profiting by the suggestion he had received, as one intimately connected with his own safety, and the yet unrevealed nature of the danger that threatened Metellus—he snatched from the ground a small roll of parchment which had fallen from

the girdle of the dead barber, and placed it hastily within the folds of his own vest.

"Away," again added the stern voice of Vespasian, "an outcry for this caitiff must soon be made, and the honor of a soldier should not be stained by the blood of one so base, however righteously shed."

They passed swiftly through the gloom of the grove, into the open space beyond, and then, as if regardless of observation, beneath the serene but dim starlight of the plain, pursued their way towards the city.

CHAPTER III.

THE TOMB OF CÆCILIA METELLA.

There is a stern round tower of other days,
Firm as a fortress, with its fence of stone,
Such as an army's baffled strength delays,
Standing with half its battlements alone,
And with two thousand years of ivy grown,
The garland of eternity where wave
The green leaves over all by time overthrown;
What was the tower of strength? within its cave
What treasure lay so lock'd, so hid? A woman's grave.
CHILDE HAROLD.

This will be done, and well concealed,
But see the writing!

THE MARTYR.

As the tribune issued through the Nævian gate
and bent his course along the shaded avenue called
the Appian way, a glance at the glittering height
of the capitol, over which the crescent moon was
just rising with a tremulous and uncertain lustre,
announced that the hour of his appointment had
already arrived. Gathering his cloak around him
in closer folds, as a protection against the damp air
that swept from the Tiber and the numerous sheets
of water in the southern suburbs, he quickened his
pace, until a less public road induced him to change
his route toward the place of meeting.

Ere long a beautiful grove of cypress, in the

midst of which arose the magnificent tomb of Cecilia Metella became visible in the distance. His first glance was sufficient to convince him that his presence was expected. The same female figure which had so often crossed his path during the day and evening was distinctly seen among the trees. She was not, however, alone. At the entrance of the grove stood a tall form, as if of a person on guard, while one or two others lay couched in the shadow of the trees.

A transient suspicion of danger crossed the mind of Flavius as he drew near, and his hand mechanically sought the hilt of his sword. But his step manifested no indecision. Proceeding forward with the same firm and measured pace, he soon confronted the sentinel, who, as though regardless of his vicinity, stood motionless as a statue, in the moonlight.

"Welcome, tribune," said the female, in the same low musical accents he had heard before.

"I have sought this strange interview," replied Flavius, "in obedience to your request: if you have aught to impart, concerning me or my friends, speak; if not—"

"The suspicion," replied the woman, "is ill-timed, but you shall have the advantage of the doubt. Speak, Varus Dobella!"

"Dobella!" exclaimed the tribune, in an incredulous tone.

A manly form enveloped in a military cloak arose from the ground, and throwing back the hood, revealed the well known features of his former colleague and equal in military rank.

"We meet, my friend," he said, "under cover of the night, but our enterprise is worthy of a sol-

dier's heart and a soldier's hand. I know that in the bosom of Subrius Flavius there is one heart that yet beats for the honor of Rome. As such, tribune, we have called thee to our conference."

"In aught that may comport with the honor of Varus Dobella," replied the tribune, advancing and taking the proffered hand of his friend, "Subrius Flavius is willing to adventure. If your object, as I suspect, has already enlisted the energies of Vespasian and Suipicius Asper, there is hardly need of this mystery."

"We seek," replied Dobella, quickly, while a heavy sigh proceeded from the female at his side, "to prevent crime, not to commit it. It is enough, Flavius, that I know to what you allude, and with me the words of friendship are sacred. The arrows of vengeance are in the quiver of the Almighty, and they will smite the tyrant when the cup of his iniquities is full."

"Noble Dobella," exclaimed the woman in quick and earnest accents, "surely the crimes which cry aloud to heaven—"

"Peace, my sister," responded the soldier, "you know not what spirit you are of. The powers that be, are ordained of God. Hast thou forgotten already the last admonition of the apostle?"

The person he addressed bowed her head and was silent; and, as if in answer to the inquiring look of Flavius, the soldier proceeded,

"There is that within me, my friend, which deters me from participating in the designs of Vespasian and Piso. When I tell you that I am a Christian, you will perhaps sneer at the despised name."

"Nay, Varus," replied the tribune, "I have more than suspected this."

"The time may come, Flavius, when you will seek to know more of that which were hardly well spoken of here. Suffice it to say, that the laws of them I serve bind me to the throne of the Cæsars, so long as my hand may aid in upholding it without impiety.

"Is there no impiety," again interposed the female, "in the dreadful mockeries of this day—a feast to the gods celebrated with parricidal hands—is there no impiety in the revelry and prostitution of this night? Oh Rome, Rome! what shall deliver thee but the arm of the Lord?"

"Nay, my sister," began the soldier.

"Varus Dobella," continued the woman in a tone of deep enthusiasm, regardless of the interruption—"I know that our brethren look upon me as a misguided woman, and approve not the secret purpose of my heart. But there is a spirit within me which impels me to brave even their reproaches. I seek not the grace of baptism, for there is reserved for me a baptism of blood. I dare not approach even the foot of the altar, for I have not yet learned to subdue the fires of human passion. But as surely as I believe that Christ is God, so surely do I believe that the tyrant shall be smitten."

Dobella bent his head and groaned audibly. The tones of the speaker ceased, and she retired to a short distance and sat upon one of the steps of the tomb.

"Thou hast heard," replied the soldier, after a brief pause, taking the hand of Flavius, "thou hast heard the words of one who has dared to

mingle earthly elements in that offering of the heart which should be made in the spirit of pure and unreserved devotion to Him who rebuked his disciples when they would call down fire upon their enemies."

"The woman," replied the tribune, with a look of solemnity, for the fervor of the singular being he had just heard had impressed his mind, "the woman seems to me as one inspired of heaven. Hast thou not checked her too harshly?"

"I once reasoned as thou reasonest, my friend," added Dobella, "but the living Spirit of God has, I trust, purged away the mists from my soul. The work to which I invite you this night is one of salvation rather than of destruction. A deadly blow is aimed in high quarters, at the prosperity of Rome, and the lives of some of her noblest citizens. Among these, Julius Metellus is the first destined to fall. You can aid in warding off the stroke."

"This," replied Flavius, pointing to the woman, "I have before learned from the female before us. But why was the communication reserved for this place?"

"That thou mayest know where to find a place of safety for those whom thou shalt rescue. Amidst the general wickedness of the living, those who would escape the overthrow must seek refuge in the silent halls of the dead. Follow, then, and note the place well, for it is among the secret things of Rome."

In obedience to a gesture of Dobella, one of the attendants advanced to the tomb and removed a stone from the floor at the summit of the steps. Behind this was a block of marble seemingly im-

penetrable, but which rolled aside on the application of the hand to a slight groove near one of the sides of the opening, and disclosed a flight of steps descending beneath the surface.

Flavius and Dobella passed together into the tomb, and stood upon the sanded floor which extended for a considerable distance on every side, until the eye failed to penetrate the gloom beyond. A feeble light came down through an opening in the tower above, just sufficient to enable them to discern the general features of the place. The air was comparatively pure and dry, and at the bottom of the stair a lamp hung suspended from an arch in the stone, with materials for replenishing it placed on a shelf near at hand.

"Hast thou the scroll, Flavius?" asked Dobella, as he took the lamp from its place, "it contains evidence of the danger we anticipate."

The tribune produced the parchment and placed it in the hand of his companion. It was a manuscript in bold Roman text, with a motto in Greek.

"It is as I supposed," said Dobella, repeating the motto, *ἐμοῦ ζῶντος γαῖα μὴ χθήτω πύρι*, and returning it to the tribune, "read, my friend, and thou wilt no longer be sceptical."

The first words which he read seemed to rivet the attention of Flavius upon the parchment. An indignant glance flashed for a moment in his eye, his cheek crimsoned, and an angry cloud settled upon his brow.

"Per hercle!" he exclaimed, "this wretch shall perish in the ruin he designs. Never did heart of man nourish a plot so foul."

"Yours is a virtuous indignation," replied Dobella, "but what you would do must be done cau-

tiously as well as firmly. My own mission now is ended in this place, and a sacred engagement calls me elsewhere. Make what observations you deem necessary, in this silent place, for I doubt not that you will find its shelter welcome ere many days. Farewell, Flavius, and in the hour of need count upon an arm that can yet strike with its old vigor in defence of the right."

"One question more, Dobella—the woman from whom I have received so many intimations, who and what is she?"

"Thou shalt know," replied the other, "when the knowledge may profit you. Forgive this show of mystery, but we are treading on dangerous ground, and in such circumstances even excess of caution is useful."

So saying, he grasped the hand of the tribune and ascended the steps. The stone descended lightly upon the aperture, and Flavius was left alone in the tomb.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CATACOMBS.

Are you amazed sir?
So great a Roman spirit—and doth it tremble?
How cam'st thou in? to whom thy business?
MASSINGER.

——'Tis but a mockery of the sense
Idle and vain! we are but where we were:
Still wandering in a city of the dead.
ROGERS.

THUS left to himself, the tribune proceeded to make those observations which might render his knowledge of the place of most service to him when compelled to seek its shelter with his friends. Heavy arches of stone carved with funereal ornaments arose on all sides, and the marble sarcophagus, containing the remains of her to whose memory the strong mausoleum was erected, stood in the centre of the area, as stainless as on the day when the seals were first affixed to it. No sound from the upper world penetrated this abode of death. The flickering shadows of the foliage that clustered around the opening of the tower, were cast by the moonlight upon the sand below, but all else, except that part of the tomb within the little circle of light produced by the lamp

he held in his hand, remained shrouded in darkness.

On the eastern side, he discerned what appeared to be the opening of a passage beyond the arch, and advanced to discover the retreat to which it led. The narrow space soon conducted him into an outer chamber, guarded also on both sides with frowning arches, within which were cut rude sarcophagi from the native rock. An examination of the adjacent parts proved that the apartment in which he now stood had originally possessed no communication with the tomb he had left, and that the passage between had been recently constructed, for the marks of the hammer upon the stone were comparatively rude and fresh.

From the eastern extremity of this chamber several passages led in different directions: and the peculiar aspect of the apertures was such as to convince him that he had entered one of those extensive places of sepulture which were constructed by Roman liberality for the common benefit of the citizens. Curiosity, seconded by the hope of discovering an egress into some part of the city which might promise a safer way of retreat in emergency than the entrance of the tomb through which he had passed, led him to explore still farther these mysterious subterranean abodes. As he advanced, the air became more damp and close, and the feeble illumination produced by the lamp was barely sufficient to guide him through passages which grew continually more intricate. Now and then a mass of stone or a broken shaft, separated from some pedestal below the arches, obstructed his path. Occasionally, also, a sound, as of distant thunder, announced that he was wandering beneath some

public way; and the stillness which succeeded brought an awe upon his spirit whose influence he could not resist.

“In this profound silence,” thought he, “must terminate all the busy activities—the burning passions—the hopes and fears of the millions above me. In this dreary abode, each shall, ere long, take his appointed place. What a lesson do these dim and silent halls read to the feverish and aspiring heart of man. The dust of past generations is around me, and I—a single spark of life amidst the deep unutterable gloom—how feeble seems the tenure which binds me to the living, how narrow the space which separates me from the dead. And yet, upon the battle-field, we learn to smile at death, and to laugh away the terrors with which he approaches us. Philosophy has sought to make death serene and lovely, and the poets have fabled him as the friend of the virtuous and the brave. But here, confronted with his grim unadorned aspect, the stoutest heart must quail before him. Shades of the departed—what are ye now? These cold damp ashes are rayless, voiceless; baser than the earth with which they mingle; but is the spirit of man as perishable as the clay? In vain, alas! we ask in vain—”

The reverie of the soldier was suddenly broken by sounds which had power to enchain his faculties as with a spell, and as he listened, his heart sank beneath the dread of the place. Faintly, as broken and softened by the distance, the music floated to his ear—now hushed in silence, which itself was eloquent, and now breaking forth anew in strains which seemed to breathe both sorrow and joy. Amidst the pauses of this strange unearthly

music, he heard the beatings of his own heart. A deeper gloom seemed to invest the scene around him, and he almost looked to behold the skeletons arise from their resting places and start up in the forms of living and breathing men.

The sounds approached, and a trembling light struggled obscurely through the gloom in the distance—then it was quickly darkened, and then became visible again through the long and tortuous passages. The manner in which it revealed itself plainly indicated that it was approaching the cross-path where he stood. He was soon enabled to distinguish the tones of different voices as they rose together in what seemed to be a sort of religious hymn. At times it thrilled through the cavern in clear, unbroken, flute-like strains; then the melody became soft, deep, and plaintive, and then a solemn, powerful chorus, preceded the temporary pause. The sentiments of the hymn, expressed in the melodious language of the Greeks, accorded with the beautiful simplicity of the music, and he was enabled to distinguish the following sentences :

“ Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more ;
Death hath no more dominion over him.
For in that he died, he died unto sin once ;
But in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.”

“ Christ is risen from the dead,
And become the first fruits of them that slept.
For since by man came death,
By man came also the resurrection of the dead ;
For as in Adam all die,
Even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

A singular sensation chilled the heart of the tribune as he listened to the words, for they brought an answer to the solemn questions which the as-

pect of these dreary abodes of mortality had suggested to his mind. He heard the triumphant words of those to whom the doctrine of the soul's immortality was no beautiful, vague abstraction, but a truth embraced with all the power of the understanding and all the fervor of the heart ; which gave them energy and hope amidst the struggles of life, and enabled them to look forward with a sustained calmness to the approach of death. He had often heard of the peculiarities of the Christians ; but taught, by the opinions of his age and associates, to regard them merely as a fanatic sect of those haughty and intolerant Jews whose desperate struggles against the overwhelming power of Rome had even then become an astonishment to mankind, he had lent a careless ear to the doctrines attributed to them, while he scrupled not to give credit to the report of the secret crimes with which they were charged. The words of Dobella were yet lingering in his ear, and the impression produced by the brief but candid statement of that brave soldier, concerning the principles which actuated him as a Christian, had already weakened the force of his old prejudices. He saw, in him, that the partisans of the new sect might be noble, self-devoted, virtuous, and sternly loyal ; while he could not but admire the exalted and serene enthusiasm with which the spirit of Christianity seemed to animate him in all his relations. While the perverted zeal of the female who had borne a part in the conference had enlisted his interest, deeply stirred as his own mind was with generous indignation at the past enormities and projected crimes of the tyrant, he was at no loss to understand the justice of the affectionate but pointed re-

buke which Dobella had administered to her. He saw that while the faith of the latter reposed calmly upon the truth that the God whom he served would, in his own good time, work the overthrow of wickedness, his religious principles forbade him to sanction conspiracy and murder by enlisting in the enterprise which was already on foot; but yet, that in every undertaking necessary to prevent the due consequences of the enormous crimes which Nero projected, his spirit was active and his hand was ready.

Thoughts like these passed rapidly through his mind as he awaited, amidst the temporary cessation of the music, the nearer approach of what seemed to be a funeral procession of the Christians. A few moments sufficed to bring them to the chosen place of sepulture. It was within one of the largest vaults; and a simple slab of pure marble had been laid upon the ordinary supports of the sarcophagus, upon which the latter firmly rested.

A slight change in the position of the tribune enabled him to command a view of the ceremony, while he himself was screened from observation. The momentary reluctance to remain a concealed witness of rites which were ordinarily performed in secrecy, was overcome by the strong desire which he felt to know more of the true principles and practices of men whom he had once regarded with abhorrence as the foes of all religion and humanity, but whom he now suspected to have been grossly misrepresented by the popular voice. He reflected too, that the effort to withdraw himself was hardly to be made without disturbing the rites of affection and piety. He remained, therefore, standing within the broad shadow of the arch that

frowned above him, while the faint glimmer of the expiring lamp was thrown altogether within the ample vault.

The party of the Christians more immediately engaged in the ceremony consisted of some twenty or thirty persons, while a larger concourse appeared to fill the passages beyond. The corpse, evidently that of a Roman citizen of the middle rank, was enveloped in a white toga, and laid upon a light couch borne by four men whose habits indicated an equality of rank with the deceased. It was preceded by four torch-bearers, and an equal number of virgins clothed in white, and bearing flowers walked on each side with features partly veiled, and eyes steadily bent upon the ground. Then followed the officiating minister clothed in a snowy tunic, and bearing in his hand a scroll of parchment ; after whom came the mourners and the friends of the deceased. The accompaniment of instrumental music, so common in Roman funerals was dispensed with, and the heads of the female mourners, contrary to the usual custom, were covered with veils of linen.

The corpse was laid in the sarcophagus in silence. The virgins advanced and strewed it with flowers. Then the mourners drew near to take their last sad farewell of the departed. They bent over it with flowing tears, and imprinted the kiss of affection upon the pale brow and bloodless lips, while the deep tones of the reader were heard at interval, administering the solemn lessons and consolations of the divine word to the living.

“ I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord ;
He that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall
he live :
And he that liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.”

"I know that my Redecmer liveth,
 And that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.
 And though after my flesh worms destroy this body
 Yet in my flesh I shall see God,
 Whom mine own eyes shall behold and not another."

The tribune heard the suppressed sobs of the afflicted ones as they retired from their melancholy office of love. They had scarcely reached their places, when the whole group, as if inspired by a common feeling, united in the following hymn.

FUNERAL HYMN OF THE CHRISTIANS.

I.

Brother, rest from sin and sorrow,
 Death is o'er and life is won!
 On thy slumber dawns no morrow,
 Rest! thine earthly race is run.

II.

Brother wake—the night is waning,
 Endless day is round thee pour'd!
 Enter thou the rest remaining
 For the people of the Lord.

III.

Brother wake, for He who loved thee,
 He who died that thou might'st live;
 He who here through grace, approved thee,
 Waits thy crown of joy to give.

IV.

Fare thee well—though woe is blending
 With the tones of earthly love,
 Triumph high and joy unending
 Wait thee in the realms above.

Amidst the impressive silence that ensued, the voice of the reader was again heard, repeating those beautiful and animating words of St. Paul, which set forth the high warrant for the Christian's hope in the resurrection of the dead, and his belief in

the life of the world to come. The recent visit of the Apostle to Rome had made them familiar with the epistles addressed to the churches which he founded, and the noble argument and spirit-stirring exhortations of the Epistles to the Corinthians were peculiarly prized and consulted on every occasion of their assembling together.

Fresh flowers were strewn upon the body, and when the marble shut it from sight, the whole assembly knelt in prayer. In few, simple, but fervent words, the presbyter addressed the throne of grace, then rising from his knees, he pronounced over them, as they knelt, the apostolic benediction. Then the assemblage arose, and prepared for departure.

Deeply moved by the scene he had witnessed, and the language he had heard, the tribune knelt involuntarily when the prayer was offered, and his bosom heaved with new and uncontrollable emotions. He listened attentively to every word that proceeded from the lips of the presbyter, and his heart was opened to the sense. As his eye turned from the thin but glowing features of the speaker, to the countenances of the mourners, lit up with all the beauty of hope, and the forms of the virgins kneeling around the sarcophagus, now covered with flowers; he almost looked to see the marble burst open by the reanimated form of the departed Christian. A new world of hope and of high truth was suddenly opened before him. He no longer wondered at the energy which sustained the disciples of Jesus, as he had seen them sustained in the midst of perils, sufferings and death. What he had once looked upon as the strangest and most misguided enthusiasm, now seemed the resolved,

but yet sober action of reasonable men upon principles which alone could truly elevate and strengthen human nature. The spirit of God had touched his heart through the instrumentality of the Divine word and at that moment, Subrius Flavius—though he knew it not—was “not far from the kingdom of heaven.”

So intense and earnest were the thoughts of his heart, after the words of prayer had ceased to fall upon his ear, that he hardly noticed the movement of the party, until the sound of their retreating footsteps aroused him from his meditations. As he arose from his knees, the outline of a human form was visible through the gloom, and so sudden was the appearance, and so rapid the movement by which it approached him, that he recoiled in surprise, not unmingled with dread. His astonishment was increased when the partial withdrawal of the veil from the brow disclosed to him the features of a female singularly expressive, in the marble forehead, pale cheek, and burning eye.

“Thou see'st her with whom thou hast often spoken this day,” said the female, “for I have been about thy footsteps and have brought thee hither for a sacred purpose. I have sought for thee in vain in the tombs; but God, I see, hath led thee to behold that to which Dobella would not conduct thee. Tribune, thou hast seen the burial of a Christian.”

“And have profited by the sight,” replied Flavius with emotion—“Whoever thou art, mysterious woman, thou may'st tell to thy companions that Subrius Flavius seeks to know more of that religion of which he hath by accident obtained these stolen glimpses.”

"In me," replied the other, "you see nought but the freed handmaid of the mother of Lucan."

"Epicharis?" replied the tribune incredulously, and scanning the half concealed countenance of the Greek with attention.

"Behold!" she replied, withdrawing the veil, "time and tears perhaps have so changed me, that they who knew me in the days of my folly, may scarce recall my features now. I *was* Epicharis, I *am* what a power which I cannot resist, hath made me."

"Art thou a Christian?" asked the soldier, as the scene in the grove recurred to his memory, "but I need not ask. Thou art she with whom Dobella spake but now."

"I dare not call myself a Christian," replied Epicharis, "for I have not yet been brought, and I dare not approach the holy waters of baptism. But this boots not now; I am come to conduct thee to a scene which it is necessary that thou shouldst behold, but to which thou couldst not gain access without me. Follow and be silent."

So saying, she seized the lamp from the place where the tribune had rested it, and led the way with rapid but silent footsteps, through the gloomy passages of the catacombs, in the direction which the funeral party had taken. While they are on their way, it is necessary that our attention should be directed, for a few moments, to a far different scene.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROAD TO ANTIUM.

Somebody repeating in conversation,

Ἐμὸν θανόντος γαῖα μὲχθήτω πυρὶ

When I am dead, let fire devour the world,

Let it be, said Nero, *whilst I am living*, ἐμὸν ζῶντος.

SUET IN NERON, s. 38.

THE same chariot which had attracted the notice of the tribune and his party at the Porta Triumphalis, ere the festivities had commenced at the lake of Agrippa, was rolling, at midnight, with all the speed which the best and freshest horses could impart to it, along the Appian way, far beyond the tomb of Cecilia Metella. Several outriders, whose utmost exertions were hardly sufficient to keep pace with the chariot, followed in its train; and, far in the distance, two mounted grooms were leading steeds richly caparisoned as if for the relief of those more immediately engaged in the service.

The chariot was occupied by the Emperor, Tigellinus, and Ibrim the Astrologer. In his flushed cheek, scowling brow, and nervous manner, Nero exhibited symptoms of some great recent excitement, from whose influence he had not yet recovered; while the air and demeanor of the favorite courtier at his side were perfectly easy and undisturbed. The

Chaldean leaned back in his seat, and was gazing abstractedly towards heaven, as if no earthly vicissitude could interrupt his communion with the stars.

"This is a most unlucky chance, venerable sooth-sayer," exclaimed Nero suddenly, with a sneer which he took no pains to disguise, "If the stars deceive us thus, I shall not know in what to trust."

"Trust in your own heart, puissant Cæsar," replied the courtier, smiling with polite contempt upon the astrologer, "for there are auspices which will never deceive a man. Is it not so, Ibrim?"

"My lord hath said it," replied the latter in a humble tone, while the momentary kindling in his serene, but brilliant eye, bespoke the disdain of a spirit conscious of intellectual power.

"But what sayest thou," demanded the Emperor, excited and yet awed by the cool dignity of the seer, "what sayest thou to the manifest falsehood of thy lying predictions?"

"Say on," rejoined Ibrim in a meek but firm tone, "for thy servant will bear. He is but the minister of a higher power whom thy words reach not."

"Tell me, then," again asked Nero, "why thou hast dared to deceive me?"

"Thine own idle fears have deceived thee, Cæsar," he replied, "I predicted danger and it has come. I predicted success, and it is not afar off. Another shadow hath crossed the zenith of thy fortune, and it is the last."

"Dost hear, Tigellinus," said Nero, turning to the courtier, who sat regarding the discussion with the serene indifference of one to whom all power

except that of human nature is but a fable of childhood, "my heart prompts me to believe this man."

"Nay, thou may'st worship Astarte and all her train, if thou wilt, my prince, but the strong heart and the ready hand are my divinities, and as such I pledge them to thy favorable auspices."

"Thou art but a graceless scoffer," rejoined the Emperor, "and I wonder not that thy schemes have miscarried. Syphax was thine agent, and the fool has yielded up his life with the dangerous secret—"

"Which thine own lips and thine own hand entrusted to his keeping, august Cæsar. The business of the writing was no work of mine. But it matters not now, my prince; the die has been cast, spite of fate and the stars. We have pushed our bark from the shore, and must take wind and tide as they set."

"The horoscope presents a brilliant and unclouded field," remarked the astrologer, "henceforth the star of Nero is in the ascendant."

"Brilliant enough, I warrant thee, sage Ibrim," replied the courtier with a laugh of condescension, "but the glittering summit of the capitol shall scarcely gleam, all this night, from an unclouded field."

"Enough of this, Tigellinus," said Nero impatiently, "and now let us hear what thou hast accomplished, for in the alarm produced by the discovery of that caitiff's death, I have been like one in a dream."

"Before thou breathest the air of Antium, my prince, thine enemies will have ceased to live and the destruction of Rome itself shall hide the deed from those who may be disposed to look seriously

into the matter. My measures are, I think, indifferently well laid—”

“And for thine own interest in the overthrow—”

“Nay, my prince,” added the courtier with a meaning smile, “press me not too closely upon that point. Enough that I *have* my own ends to serve, and that they are distinct from my master’s. Enough, also, that I can fix the death of Syphax upon the tribune, and that the order has already gone forth for his arrest.”

“Thou hast done well!” exclaimed Nero, as the courtier concluded the full detail of his arrangements, and then carelessly threw himself back in the chariot.

“I owe thee thanks for the commendation, Cæsar, and the consciousness that it is as yet but feebly deserved, will give me vigor and celerity. But the hour has come for my departure. From the heights of Antium thou shalt soon see a sight which will be a world’s wonder—and thou may’st sing, as thou alone canst sing, the seige of Troy, Paris is already in the toils—and Helen—”

He tarried not to finish the sentence, but after a brief but ceremonious adieu to the Emperor, arrested the arm of the charioteer, and in a few moments stood alone upon the road, awaiting the arrival of his own steed. Ere another half hour had expired, he saw before him the tomb of Cecilia Metella, around which a cohort of soldiers were closely gathered, with muffled helmets and arms in trail.

CHAPTER VI.

BAPTISM.

See, she comes,
How sweet her innocence appears! more like
To heaven itself than any sacrifice
That can be offered to it. By my hopes
Of joy hereafter, the sight makes me doubtful
In my belief.

MASSINGER.

THE scene which burst upon the eye of the tribune, as his companion with a significant gesture, designed to intimate that he ought to proceed no farther, glided from his side, was sufficient in itself to arrest his footsteps. Through the slightly curved passage which terminated in what appeared to be a large central chamber of the catacomb, he discerned a numerous congregation of Christians gathered together, as it seemed, for the celebration of some rite of yet greater solemnity than that which he had just witnessed. In the centre of the chamber arose a tomb of unusual dimensions, covered with drapery of white, upon which stood a basin of silver in the midst of freshly gathered flowers. Numerous lamps suspended from the ceiling shed a brilliant light on all within the scope of his vision, and a profound silence reigned over the scene.

The same individual who had officiated at the recent ceremony, ere long arose from his place, and advancing to the tomb, seemed to await the movements of the auditory. Presently a train of young females clothed in white, were seen issuing from among the crowd, and the heart of Flavius beat high with surprise, and a deeper emotion, as Julia Metella, with her kinsman Dobella on the one hand, and Salome on the other, knelt down before the font. Then the attendant virgins closed around them, kneeling also, followed by the rest, till the whole congregation was bowed in silent prayer.

The voice of a deacon was then heard, announcing the commencement of the devotions,

“My brethren, let us pray.”

The hands of the kneeling assembly were upraised towards heaven, and they united together in prayer for the Christians, for the infidels, for the feeble, the sick, the afflicted, for all who mourn. The blessing of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost was invoked upon the candidate, and the pure and sparkling element solemnly consecrated to the mystical washing away of sin. When this was over, the assembly rose and stood upon their feet, and the presbyter addressed the maiden—

“Who art thou?”

“I am Julia, the daughter of Metellus,” she replied in a voice trembling with emotion, every tone of which went to the heart of the tribune.

“What dost thou wish, daughter of Metellus?” again asked the presbyter.

“To issue,” was the reply, “from the darkness of idolatry into the light and liberty of the disciples of Christ?”

“Dost thou believe,” he continued, “that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?”

"I do," was the low but firm response of the candidate.

"Wilt thou be baptized in this faith?"

"That is my desire."

"Hast thou weighed well thy resolution," said the presbyter, "art thou willing, if Christ should call thee to the sacrifice, to leave all and follow him—can'st thou suffer with him that thou may'st reign with him?"

"I can," responded the trembling voice of the maiden, "the Lord being my helper."

"Grant, O Lord," said the presbyter, while at the conclusion of each petition the fervent 'amen' rose from the lips of the kneeling assembly, "to this person, that the old Adam may be so buried in her, that the new man may live and grow in her."

"Grant that she may have power to withstand the world, the flesh and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant to her life's end."

"Grant, O Lord, that she may have grace so to confess thee before men, that thou wilt confess her in the presence of the Father and of the holy angels."

"Name this person," continued the presbyter to Dobella.

The soldier advanced and whispered in his ear, after which the candidate knelt down, and while he poured the water upon her brow, he said aloud,

"Julia, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The prayers and thanksgivings for the new disciple succeeded. The words of the beautiful baptismal hymn rolled through the dim arches and reverberating alleys of the catacombs, and the congregation arose to receive the parting benediction.

The first impulse of Flavius was to burst from his concealment, and to become a partaker in the ceremony by which the maiden was to become a disciple of the Christian faith. But the solemnity of the scene restrained him, and as the simple, but powerfully impressive service proceeded, the awe deepened upon his spirit, and his heart sank under the first convictions of sin and unworthiness. There had been no symbol presented to the outward sense—but a higher than human power had opened his understanding, and the glorious doctrine of pardon, of hope, of sanctification through the obedience and death of a Divine Redeemer arose as the day-star upon the darkness through which he was passing. The words of the benediction were yet upon the lips of the presbyter, when constrained by a feeling which he could resist no longer, he rushed to the side of Dobella, who started up in amazement, and clinging to the drapery of the tomb he cried, in a voice broken by contrition,

“Men and brethren, what must I do to be saved?”

Amidst the murmur of surprise and expectation which followed this sudden interruption, while Dobella and the presbyter advanced to raise the soldier, scarcely knowing what they did, a voice earnest, thrilling, tremulous with emotion proceeded from the shadows of the arches, pronouncing the words—

“Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and thou shalt receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

“Welcome, my brother,” exclaimed Dobella,

throwing himself upon the prostrate form of the tribune, while the grateful tears flowed unheeded down his cheeks, bronzed under the sun of the East, and scarred in many a battle field—"Welcome, my brother, to the soldiery of the cross. We have fought together under the banners of an earthly prince—together will we serve the great captain of our salvation!"

A deadly paleness overspread the features of Julia Metella as she first became conscious of the presence of the tribune. Amidst the solemnity and pure self devotion of that momentous hour, it seemed as if God had already answered one of her first and most fervent prayers. She had offered herself to heaven in view of the most painful of sacrifices; the sacrifice of the love of one whose image, by every manly virtue, by every trait of human nobleness, by the frankness and tenderness of an uncorrupted spirit, had been impressed indelibly upon her pure and affectionate heart. That the effort had been most trying, and the struggle most severe, may be easily conceived. But what were her emotions when she thus saw him she loved, brought by the power of God in penitence and tears to the very foot of that very altar, where the dedication of her own heart had been made? The recoil of feeling was too much for her strength. With a cry in which the accents of joy, and doubt, and hope, were all blended, she called upon the name of her lover, and then bursting into tears, sank almost insensible into the arms of Salome.

"Who art thou?" demanded the presbyter, much moved by the scene which had so singularly succeeded to the quiet and rapt devotion of the baptismal ceremony.

"Behold," said Dobella, grasping the hand of the tribune as they rose together, "Subrius Flavius seeks the fold of the Redeemer."

"Not many noble, not many wise, not many mighty, are called," responded the presbyter solemnly, "art thou able, tribune, to drink of the cup of which Christ drank, and to be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with?"

"I have looked upon your assemblies, holy man," replied the tribune, "I have heard your words, and I am brought by a power which I cannot resist, to the feet of Him whom I once thoughtlessly despised and reviled. Do with me what thou wilt, I believe that Jesus Christ is God—the Son of the one only living and true God, who came to redeem the world.

"Reject him not," was heard in the same impassioned and thrilling tones which had before startled the assembly from the arches—"reject him not, he is a chosen vessel to bear the name of Jesus before kings, and to witness a good confession with the people of God. Holy Linus, reject him not!"

"Reject him not, man of God," added Dobella, "he is my brother in arms, he is the friend of my soul."

"Reject him not," said Salome, looking up from the pale, passionless features of her mistress with an appealing look to the presbyter, "for God hath brought these two together. They were lovely in their lives, and in death they shall not be divided."

"The glorious crown which Julia Metella shall win," she added, as a sweet smile spread itself, like the first blush of sunrise, over the countenance of Julia, while her lips murmured indistinguishable

words—"is reserved also for Subrius Flavius."

The presbyter lifted up his eyes to heaven, and for a moment was lost in thought. Then, as his glance fell upon the scene before him, he bowed his head and said

"My brethren, let us pray. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God for one sinner that repenteth, and God will reveal his arm to his servants in the times of refreshing from his presence."

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRIFE AND THE WARNING VOICE.

But if black scandal or foul fac'd reproach
Attend the signal of your imposition,
Your mere enforcement shall acquittance me
From all the impure blots and stains thereof.
KING RICHARD III.

THE prayer of the presbyter was interrupted by a voice which caused the assembly to start up in dismay. At one entrance of the chamber was seen the figure of a man whose emaciated features, thin white locks, and long beard of silvery whiteness, were almost sufficient to warrant the apprehension of an apparition from the dead, or of a prophet, inspired by heaven, to visit again, for some mysterious purpose, the world he had left. There was a strange depth and hollowness in the tones of his voice as his brief and hurried sentences, rolled through the gloomy vaults.

"Arise, children of the day, arise! The arm of the Lord is revealed!"

"It is Selumiel," said a voice from the alarmed congregation, "it is the dweller among the tombs."

"What calls thee here, my father," asked the presbyter, for the words and gestures of the sudden visitant denoted extraordinary excitement, "why hast thou interrupted the words of prayer?"

"What calls me here?" he repeated, advancing towards the altar, "it is because the *day* cometh. The great city of pride, of idolatry, of bloodshed is already blazing without like a fiery furnace."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Dobella, "then has the tyrant anticipated his work."

"Ye cannot save him now, and Rome is doomed of heaven," cried Epicharis, rushing from the concealment, into the midst of the assembly. "Away Dobella, away tribune, and place the maiden in the chariot of Metellus while yet ye may. Nero has indeed anticipated his work, for the death of Syphax was soon discovered, and he dared not wait the morrow."

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion," exclaimed Selumiel, tossing his arms aloft, while his sepulchral tones echoed fearfully, "the Lord will deliver his people, and the year of his redeemed is come."

"Peace, holy father," said the presbyter solemnly, "peace till the words of blessing are pronounced, for we ought not to go forth into the danger without the armor of God. Go then, my brethren," he added, raising his hands on high in the attitude of benediction, "and the blessing of the Lord of Hosts go with you."

"It is too late," shrieked Epicharis, "for the agents of the tyrant are upon us. Great God, this is what I feared."

"The company of the spearmen," exclaimed the aged Christian, as he flung himself prostrate behind the tomb, "and of the hosts gathered for the battle. But the Lord of Hosts is with *us*, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

"Sieze and bind the impious traitors," shouted

Tigellinus, who advanced rapidly with a body of his German soldiers in the chamber.

At the first rapid glance at this confirmation of his worst fears, the tribune sprang to the side of the yet scarcely conscious Julia, and grasped his weapon for the strife. The danger of their position opened upon him with dreadful distinctness, as he saw band after band filling up one passage after another until the unarmed assembly of the Christians seemed almost surrounded by a dense body of living men. The instruments which Tigellinus had selected for his work also, he saw to be those over whom his own military authority could exercise no control. Foreigners, and hostile by habit and natural jealousy, to the Prætorian troops, the German legions were the most ready and unscrupulous executors of the bloodiest resolves. A single glance exchanged with Dobella told him the spirit of that brave man was already sinking in despair of the issue.

“Seize and bind the traitors and leave the maiden to me,” again exclaimed Tigellinus. In an instant the spacious chamber was a scene of the wildest confusion. A score of armed men rushed simultaneously from the cover of the arches into the midst of the throng, and as form after form fell prostrate upon the floor of the tomb, the shrieks of the females and the groans of the wounded arose on every side.

“Resist not, my brethren,” exclaimed Linus the presbyter, as he cast himself upon the furniture of the altar, as if to guard the sacred utensils from pollution, “resist not, for this is the hour and power of darkness.”

In fact there seemed to be no effort or show at

resistance on the part of the Christians, except in that spot where Dobella and the tribune stood before the Roman maiden, supported on one side by Salome and by Epicharis on the other.

"Noble Dobella!" exclaimed Tigellinus, scoffingly, as he paused for a moment before the calm front thus presented to impede his progress, "when did'st thou ally thyself with these miscreants? and you tribune, give way if you would not share the fate of Syphax, whose ignoble blood stains your hand."

A gleam of defiance and virtuous contempt shot across the features of the tribune, but he replied not.

"Hear me, Tigellinus" said Dobella, "you judge truly that I am a Christian, and as a Christian I would avoid the blood of every man. But your way to this defenceless maiden, whom the laws of God and man bind me to protect, will be over my corse."

"Bold words for one unarmed," retorted the courtier with a sneer, "seize him, soldiers, and let him spend his impotent rage elsewhere."

"Are ye men," exclaimed Epicharis to those behind, "are ye Christians, and will ye look upon this? Man of God," she added, appealing to the presbyter, who was himself struggling within the grasp of a soldier, "surely it is lawful to resist such deep iniquity as that which is now meditated."

"Defend the maiden, if need be," replied the presbyter, "but avoid blood; for he that lifts the sword shall perish by the sword."

His remaining words were drowned in the tumult which now took place. Dobella having availed himself of the confusion of the onset to wrest a

spear from the hands of one of those who advanced upon him, was contending almost single-handed with the throng. Flavius sprang forward, and before the courtier was aware of his purpose, struck the uplifted sword from his hand, and grappled with his antagonist. The space around the females was thus for the moment cleared ; but the Christians, incited by Epicharis, speedily advanced and formed a close circle around them. Beyond this circle the strife was for a few moments doubtful. The advantage which the tribune had gained over his adversary seemed about to terminate in the fall of the latter, when suddenly a blow from the hand of one of the soldiers descended upon the head of Flavius. Reeling beneath the stroke, he vainly sought to recover his grasp. Tigellinus rushed upon him and bore him to the floor, at the instant when Dobella, exhausted by his protracted exertion and overpowered by numbers, was unable to render him assistance. With an expression in which hatred and scorn were strangely mingled, the courtier bent over his fallen foe, and the dagger was about to descend, when his hand was arrested by the form of Julia, who had burst from the circle of the Christians and cast herself between Tigellinus and his victim.

“If I am the victim you seek,” she said, wildly attempting to release the grasp of the courtier upon the tunic of the tribune, “strike, but spare the life of the soldier.”

“Away maiden,” replied the other, endeavoring, but not roughly, to force her from her position while a smile of triumph shot over his features, “no lover’s tears can save him now.”

“Strike then,” exclaimed Julia, shrinking from his touch and kneeling beside the tribune, while

her veil, disengaged in the struggle, almost concealed her features as she bowed her head, "the dagger which reaches his heart, must first pass through mine."

"I war not with such as thou," replied the courtier, exasperated by the disgust which he read in her countenance, "away maiden, or my dagger shall do its work on the instant."

The countenance of Julia was upraised, but he saw in it nothing but beautiful and heroic determination. The features, it is true, were paler than the marble, there was no flush upon the cheek and the brow was clear and calm, as if fear and every other passion had been absolved by the devotedness of the woman's heart within. The glance which met his was serene, but unflinching, and strange to say, there was almost a smile upon the parted lips. For a moment the eye of Tigellinus rested upon the lovely vision, and he stood irresolute. Then as if actuated by a better feeling, he cried to those around,

"Remove the maiden."

Before the order could be executed the tribune, recovering from the effect of the blow, shook off his grasp with a single effort, and springing to his feet, suddenly placed Julia in the arms of Salome and again grappled with his adversary. For a few seconds the wild and general uproar was renewed, until a cry from Tigellinus seemed to announce that the issue of the strife was turning. The latter glared wildly around him, as if seeking some other foe, then his eye closed and his forehead writhed with pain, and he sank to the earth. At this instant the lights that hung above the altar were suddenly ex-

tinguished and a voice whispered in the ear of the tribune—

“Sieve the maiden and follow me—it is your only hope, regard nothing, pause for nothing. It is Salome that speaks.”

A single lamp, burning feebly at the entrance of one of the passages, scarcely served to enlighten the chamber sufficiently to enable the tribune, as he prepared to obey the whispered intimation, to discern the true situation of things around him. The thought of the tomb of Cæcilia Metella flashed upon his mind, as affording a refuge at least, if not the means of escape. As he turned, he caught a glimpse of the features of Salome bending anxiously for a moment over the inclined head of her mistress, and he caught words of the same import, addressed to her, as those which had been already whispered in his own ear.

“Take the arm of my mistress and follow,” again said Salome, in a low voice. She led the way in the direction of the passage, by which Flavius had issued.

“Fear not for me, Flavius,” said Julia as he hurriedly inquired, more by looks than words, whether the maiden was able to obey the intimation, “as long as I feel the support of your arm, I am strong. Hasten!”

“But Dobella,” said the tribune, looking in vain amidst the confusion to discern the form of his friend.

“He is here,” said a voice near him, “hasten my friend; if the way of escape offers not to me, it matters little.”

The tribune hesitated no longer, but drawing the arm of Julia within his own, he followed in the

direction which Salome had taken, and succeeded without difficulty, amidst the general confusion, in reaching the passage which led to the tombs.

Deprived of their leader, who had fallen by a blow from an unknown hand in the very moment of success, the soldiery no longer acted in concert, and ignorant of the place, only contributed to embarrass each other in the gloom, while the body of the Christians, unarmed and many of them bound, remained uninjured. The strife in which Dobella had been engaged seemed also to have ceased, but whether by his fall or his capture was uncertain. It was not long, however, before this state of things was terminated, by an interruption equally sudden and terrific. A low rumbling sound, as if proceeding from the earth beneath their feet, was heard distinctly by every ear, for a time, and this was succeeded by a deathlike silence, during which it seemed that the very pulses of those assembled were arrested by apprehension. Then the same sounds recurred, but louder, deeper, more awful than before—and the ground seemed trembling underneath them. The Christians, as if by one impulse common to them all, threw themselves upon their knees for prayer. The arms dropt from the hands of the soldiers, and here and there a stalwart form bowed by the sudden terror, sank to the earth, while many of those who kept their feet, clung to each other for support. To the wild imagination of the German recruits, sounds so appalling amidst the mystery and gloom of the scene, were naturally interpreted as the dreadful premonitions of a destruction about to overwhelm them for their unhallowed intrusion into the courts of death. And while every eye was bent in intense anxiety upon

the altar, the outlines of which were faintly visible in the uncertain light of the single lamp that hung at the entrance of the corridor over against it, the form of Selumiel arose slowly from the place where he had cast himself, and mounting upon the projecting base of the sarcophagus, seemed towering in gigantic height to the very brow of the ample arch above. The ghastly features, the thin and scattered locks, the beard descending upon the tunic, and the loosened tunic itself displaying the shrivelled limbs of age and mortification, all seemed to belong to one over whom the last dread change of mortality had passed.

"Depart, men of sin," he cried, "for destruction cometh as a whirlwind, and the displeasure of the Lord is revealed in the earthquake and the fire. Depart, for ere long the dead around you may awake to vengeance."

"Peace, old babbler!" cried Tigellinus, who had now partially recovered from the effects of his wound, and furious at the loss of his victims, sprang upon his feet, "and ye, soldiers of Nero, secure your captives."

"Again I say depart," echoed the hollow tones of Selumiel, "depart while yet the judgment lingereth—depart while yet ye may."

The soldiery moved not, but stood awe-struck and in silence, gazing upon the wild figure before them. Again, as if in answer to his mysterious warning, the same appalling sounds were heard, and the earth heaved anew with convulsive throes.

"Do ye not hear it—do ye not feel it?" again cried Selumiel, raising his shrivelled arms to heaven while his eye burned with strange fire.

"Then die, fool, in thy madness!" exclaimed

Tigellinus, rushing forward to the place where the aged Christian stood, with his naked sword in his hand. Quick as light a female form sprang from the group, and intercepted his progress. In the gloom, the gleam of steel was discerned for a moment, in the next, the form of the courtier fell heavily to the earth.

"Once—twice, have I smitten thee," was heard in the thrilling impassioned tones of Epicharis, "but thine hour is not yet come." Before the soldiers could form the purpose of seizing her person, she darted to the opposite side of the vault and disappeared by the corridor which the tribune had taken.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BALCONY OF METELLUS.

What is your purpose ?
Speak, for the darkness gathers. Is your name
Pledged to our enterprise ?

FORD.

THE discovery of the death of Syphax and the disappearance of the scroll which the emperor had entrusted to his keeping, induced the latter to anticipate the atrocious act of firing the city, which was originally intended to have taken place some days after the revel on the lake of Agrippa. The miscreant who fell under the dagger of Sulpicius Asper, had closely watched the proceedings of the tribune and his friends during the day, and from certain whispered intimations which he had overheard, while watching at the Triumphal gate, had discovered the fact that the daughter of Metellus was to participate in the solemnities of the Christians at midnight in the catacombs. These intimations, hurriedly communicated to Tigellinus, induced the courtier to venture himself into an enterprise which promised not only to place some of his most

dreaded enemies in his power, but also to bring the Roman maiden within his grasp. Having therefore ordered a band of the German soldiers to be in readiness at the commencement of the Appian Way, the premature discovery of the design of the emperor, offered itself as an auspicious circumstance directly tending to further his own views. The concluding acts of the pageant were hurried over, and long ere the lingering body of the populace had left the scene, Nero and his favorite were far on their way towards Antium. The management of the conflagration was entrusted to the slaves of the imperial household under the direction of Anicetus, whose bold and prompt villany on many a former occasion had fixed the confidence of the Emperor. The destruction of Metellus, the capture of his daughter, and the ruin of the cause of the Christians, who were to be charged with the crime of setting fire to the city, were proposed by Tigellinus and eagerly embraced by Nero as the objects to be secured by the immediate execution of their diabolical purposes. The plot thus modified was matured with extraordinary celerity; for midnight had scarcely arrived ere the emissaries of the tyrant had dispersed to their several stations in readiness to begin the work of destruction.

The palace of Julius Metellus stood upon the commencement of the ascent of the Capitoline hill, with the broad and splendid arch-way of the Palatine Bridge on the one hand, and the Forum and Circus Maximus on the other. On the balcony overlooking the Tiber and the wide expanse of the Campus Martius on the north and west, the patrician was engaged in conference with Piso, who, with himself, had sought an early escape from the

disgraceful revelries of the night. By his own consent, his daughter had sought the private assembly of the Christians under the charge of Varus Dobella. The zeal with which his noble kinsman, who had won his profound esteem for high intelligence, bravery and virtue, had embraced the religion of the Christians, and his love for Julia who seemed to find sources of happiness in the new faith which he knew were not to be met elsewhere, had disposed him to regard with favor the proposed initiation of his daughter, by the sacrament of baptism, into a religious community of which his general impressions, notwithstanding the popular prejudices, were altogether favorable. His own mind, absorbed in the cares of his station, and the distractions of the time, had hitherto been closed against the arguments of Dobella and the occasional affectionate appeals of his daughter. Like Gallio, he "cared for none of these things." Yet while he wondered at, and almost pitied, the strange enthusiasm by which the disciples of the new system seemed to be actuated; he neither felt nor manifested hostility to its progress in his own household. Tenderly anxious as he was for the safety of his daughter, the time and the occasion presented a favorable opportunity for the visit to the private assembly. Utterly ignorant of the designs of the emperor, or the still deeper atrocity meditated by Tigellinus, the almost complete desertion of the city by the populace, left the public ways secure from interruption, a state of things which usually continued, on similar occasions of public riot, far into the morning.

The conversation of Metellus and Piso had been for a time so absorbing in its nature, that

neither had noticed the unusually early return of the citizens from the lake of Agrippa. The noise of carriages upon the bridges and roads beneath them, and the frequently recurring glare of torches at length arrested their attention. Piso was the first to break the brief silence into which both had fallen after the discussion of those matters, by which the ambitious and eloquent patrician sought to induce Metellus to join the conspiracy against the emperor, which, though almost as yet in its infancy, had already enlisted in its favor many of the first citizens of Rome.

"You will weigh the matter well, I am assured, Metellus," he said, while an anxious look crossed his fine features, "for the enterprize is one which ought to command whatever of virtue or nobleness is left in Rome. But how is this—the revellers seem to be returning from the Campus."

"It is so," replied Metellus, rising from the couch and advancing to the railing of the balcony.

"Something unusual has happened to disperse them," added Piso, as he took his station by the side of the other, "did I not know the cautious temper of our friends, I might almost fear that a premature attempt had been made in our enterprize."

The features of Metellus were darkened by anxiety, for he thought of the danger to which his child would be exposed in the event of any sudden excitement of the populace in the streets. Then the disgraceful practices of the emperor and his atrocious band, of the Augustan Society, recurred to his mind, with the certainty that insult and danger always followed in their train. Agitated by these apprehensions, he turned hastily without replying

to the observations of his companion, and, for a moment, paced the floor of the balcony with hurried steps. Then he paused again at the side of Piso, while his eye sought to pierce the dimness which hung over the southeastern suburbs of the city. The quarter of the Palatine hill was yet enveloped in silence and gloom, and beyond this the streets seemed as yet entirely deserted as far as the Nævian gate. It was not long, however, before his eye rested upon a dense, dark mass, occupying the Appian Way at some distance from the gate—which at his first glance he had but slightly noticed, mistaking it for one of the groves encircling the public fountains at intervals, along all the roads. A few moments of more attentive scrutiny sufficed to convince him that this mass was in motion towards the quarter of the catacombs.

“You are troubled, my friend,” said Piso, in some surprise at these hasty and agitated movements in one whose general calmness of manner served to render them the more observable.

“See’st thou yon dark shadow upon the Appian Way,” inquired the patrician, “unless my eyes have deceived me, there is a body of men in motion.”

“You are right,” replied Piso, looking attentively in the direction indicated, “I observe, moreover, that they are under discipline. Surely that is an unusual direction for a party of guards to take at this hour. I fear me some mischief is afoot.”

“Of that we may entertain little doubt,” replied Metellus, “and I have special reasons for anxiety as to any mischief in that quarter. My daughter is abroad, and may even now be returning.”

“Nay, then,” replied Piso, “I can well enter

into a father's feelings for one so beautiful and gentle. But she is surely not alone?"

"Dobella is with her, and her favorite slave. But even his arm might avail little against the drunken fury of the Augustan band, supported by the unscrupulous German soldiery."

So saying, the patrician advanced to the door which connected the balcony with the interior of the palace, and in answer to his summons, his confidential freedman appeared.

"How many men have remained at home, Patrocles?" he inquired anxiously.

"There are nearly a score of them below, my lord?"

"Haste then, and let them take their arms speedily, with such prudent concealment of the weapons as the state of the streets demands. See'st thou yon body of men upon the road yonder?"

"I see them, my lord," replied Patrocles, after a moment's observation, "they are soldiers of the German legion."

"Lead thy band, then, in their train as quickly as thou can'st. Wilt thou engage to overtake them ere they reach the Via Latina?"

"Readily, I think, my lord," answered the freedman—"and the service?"

"It is to defend my daughter, if necessary. Hasten—be cautious, but speed ye. Let my best steeds be ready in the court in case I should need them."

The slave made his obeisance and withdrew. Ere long the patrician observed the band which he led moving along the outer pavement of the circus, in swift but silent advance, until it was lost in the shadow of the intervening building.

The two stood for a time in silence, for their at-

tention was occupied by the increasing throng and confusion beneath them. Band after band of citizens hurried through the streets in every direction, and the shouts of the excited populace, became frequent. The illumination at the lake of Agrippa was extinguished, leaving the returning multitude in the shadow of the groves and public edifices, except where the rolling mass was here and there visible again in the moonlight.

“Who, of all yon idle throng,” observed Piso at length, “but feels the galling yoke of tyranny under which the empire groans? Who is there, above the slave and the veriest drudge, who feels not that his honor, his life, the safety of his property and family are all at the caprice of the tyrant and his rapacious courtiers? Believe me, Metellus, the people of Rome are ready for the deed of which we have spoken. They only await the action of the powerful and the noble to hurl the degenerate Cæsar to the destruction which he has merited by a thousand crimes unheard of among men.”

“Were it not,” replied Metellus, with energy, grasping the hand of the conspirator, “were it not for the bloodshed, the anarchy, the crime, which I fear as the result of such a step, this hand of mine would be the first to strike the blow, and this heart to account it the noblest action of my life.”

“Believe it not,” said Piso, rising to the full height of his commanding figure, and raising his arm to heaven, “if there is a power above us, which I have not yet dared to doubt, that power will preserve us from the wreck which sometimes overwhelms the enterprises of impious and ambitious men. For thee, Metellus, I would open a path to that eminence which thy long-tried public virtue and wisdom fit thee, of all men, to occupy.”

"No more," answered Metellus, while a flush crimsoned his cheek and brow, "No more, Piso, if the love of Rome cannot win me, think not that I would listen to motives like these. May my heart be palsied ere it entertain a thought like this."

"I did but speak from a full heart, my friend," said Piso, in an anxious and apologetic tone, conscious that he had gone too far, "but yet you will act with us, and our cause will be hallowed by the nobler dedication of virtue and disinterested patriotism. If the hearts of many turn to thee in vain as our best hope and stay in the crisis to which we look forward, we trust the gods will raise up some other, when the time demands. But lo!" he added, as he turned his gaze in the direction of the circus, "what is the meaning of this?"

Scarcely had he spoken, before the whole front of the circus exposed to their view, was suddenly, and as if by magic, enveloped in dense smoke, through which, at different points, shot the quick wreaths of flame. These speedily enlarged until the entire wood-work of the shops adjoining, together with the combustible materials which they contained, were lit up by the devouring element. Many forms were hurrying to and fro through the porticos, among whom might be discerned here and there the person of a torch-bearer darting along the open passages and disappearing into the vast interior of the building. Shouts and cries, mingled in wild confusion, soon began to indicate the fear and excitement of the populace whose onward progress was thus suddenly checked, and distinct and loud above them all, arose, at times, the tones of strong voices, sounding and spreading the alarm. The progress of the flames appeared strangely rapid, for the

blazing shops yet stood entire, and not a beam had fallen, when spiral wreaths of fire shot up towards the sky, at intervals above the upper wall, as if a dozen beacon lights had been enkindled at once along its extensive circumference. Through the openings of the Mæniana or balconies overlooking the forum, the patricians discovered that the interior of the circus was strongly illuminated, and ere long, a loud crash, followed by another and then another in quick succession, indicated that the conflagration had originally commenced within, and that the magnificent galleries of wood attached to the upper stories, had first yielded to the flames. Nor were these the only indications of the serious nature and extent of the mischief. Borne onward by the wind which had been gathering for the last hour in the western quarter, the subtle element soon reached the roofs and balconies of the adjoining houses, and swept with dreadful rapidity between the Palatine and Aventine hills, until the temple of Apollo upon the former, and that of Diana crowning the latter, seemed rising up upon the burning shores of a sea of fire.

Metellus, who had at first beheld with amazement the sudden commencement of the disaster which now threatened to involve his own palace, if not the best part of the city in destruction, sprang towards the door of the balcony, while the fall of the galleries in the circus was yet sounding in his ear.

“My child—my child,” he exclaimed, as the danger in all its extent, flashed upon his mind.

His steps were stayed by the appearance of a man in the full bright armor of the Prætorian guards, followed by another habited in a tunic of

dark cloth. In the hurry of the moment he failed to recognise the person of the former, until the well-known and stirring tones of the Prætorian prefect were heard—

“Fly, my Lord,” exclaimed Burrhus, greatly agitated, as he grasped his hand, and exchanged a glance of recognition with Piso. “If you would preserve your own life—if you would save your daughter, fly. Your steeds are already harnessed in the court, and my own troop are ready to go with you—to the tombs, to the tombs. And you, Piso, if you would aid in the defeat of a hellish plot, follow—ask no questions, for you shall know all on the way. Down, Agerinus, lead the way to the court.”

The freedman of Agrippina, for such was the attendant of Burrhus, passed quickly into the palace, followed by the rest of the group, and ere long they all issued, well mounted, from the great gate of the Portico.

“The way is yet clear at the base of the Aventine hill,” said Burrhus quickly to Agerinus, “forward for your life.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE BURNING CITY.

The streets are bright
With splendors not their own, and shine with light.
New clamors and new clangors now arise,
The sound of trumpets mixed with frighting cries.
ÆNEID, BOOK II.

THE party of the patrician had seized the last moment when their escape from the burning heat of the city could be effected with safety. Heavy and black columns of smoke, borne onward by the wind, which was increasing in violence with every moment, continually swept across their path. The flames revealing themselves at intervals, from the bosom of these suffocating clouds, seemed almost endowed with instinct, in seizing with equal celerity and certainty upon every roof and pinnacle that offered anything of unconsumed material. The frequent crash of massive towers was heard amidst the melancholy wail of the wind, and the agonized shrieks of the affrighted citizens. Here and there a company of women, with their little ones closely clasped to the breast, rushed wildly in the direction of the Tiber, followed by groups of

terror-stricken boys and citizens, bearing the few valuable articles which they were enabled to lay hold of in the universal confusion. The heart of Metellus more than once was thrilled with apprehension, as the wild reckless curse, the brutal laugh of passion, mingled with the shrill, despairing shriek, testified that rapine and violence were added to the other horrors of the night.

Well nigh blinded by the smoke and dust, they urged their horses forward through the crowded and littered streets, until sweeping round the southeastern extremity of the Aventine hill, they arrived at a quarter where the fire raged less fiercely. Yet even here the turrets and porticos were wreathed with flame, and it was fearful to behold the hollow and despairing looks with which the assembled populace watched the opportunity to escape from their unsafe position.

"Save my child, noble Metellus," cried a female, pressing forward to meet the patrician as he advanced, regardless of everything but the one dear object of his solicitude, "save my child."

"Stand back, woman," replied Agerinus, madly urging forward his exhausted steed.

"Save my child," she repeated, casting her infant within the very arms of Metellus, "and the gods prosper you as you show compassion to a distracted woman."

The patrician seized the infant, for there was that in his heart which forbade him to resist the appeal, and enveloping it hastily within the folds of his toga, dashed through the crowd. At that moment the fall of the balcony beneath which the brief delay had occurred, hid all behind them in horror and confusion.

“Forward!” shouted Burrhus, “one moment more, and the ruins of the tottering fane of Evander will obstruct our path. Forward, if we can but regain the Appian way we shall be in safety”

It was indeed, a desperate effort, but the noble steeds, blinded with the dreadful atmosphere, and scorched and bleeding, proved true to their race and culture. Onward through the mad and furious crowd—onward over the heated stones and the blackened rafters—onward through the stream of fiery dust which rolled torrent-like from the hills, through the demolished doors of the temples, the shattered porticos, and the openings of every street, they urged their way until they gained the broad level of the Appian road, and were soon swallowed up in the immense crowd of horsemen, carriages, and foot-passengers with which it was thronged.

Here, however, a new obstruction seemed to be cast in their path. The confused sounds of voices of rolling carriages, of trampling steeds and clashing arms promiscuously mingled, subsided for a moment as the strong blast of a trumpet, blown by the lips of a horseman who had ascended for the purpose, the broad platform at the base of one of the public fountains, rolled on the ears of the crowd. Then a voice was heard proclaiming—

“Back, citizens of Rome—back to the Tiber and the Campus Martius. The most sacred Emperor has thrown open to you the palace of Agrippa, the field of Mars, and even his own gardens. Back, while ye may, for the Nævian gate is closed.”

“Forward,” shouted Burrhus with a cry of generous disdain, as beneath the strong red light he exchanged a meaning look with Piso. **“If the Nævian gate is closed, there is strength in Rome to-**

night to open it—forward.” The crowd instantly replied in a voice which rent the heavens,

“Burrhus leads us on—“ we will follow Burrhus.”

“Then thus perish every traitor,” replied the trumpeter, as with a sudden movement he hurled his javelin at the towering form of the prefect. Metellus had not time to gain the side of his friend, before another weapon of the same kind pierced his own garment, inflicting as it passed off, a slight wound in his breast.

The frame of the prefect bent upon the saddle, but still he urged his horse onward, shouting in a voice enfeebled by pain—“forward.”

The javelin had scarcely left the hands of the trumpeter, ere Agerinus vaulted from his saddle, and bounding with one leap over the crowd, threw himself upon the former and tore him from his steed. The head piece fell off in the struggle that ensued, revealing the scowling brow and sinister features of Anicetus.

“Behold, citizens,” exclaimed the excited Agerinus, as with terrific strength he tore away the armor of his foe, and hurled him down among the crowd—“behold the murderer of the daughter of Germanicus—behold the incendiary of Rome.”

Anicetus fell in the midst of the group below, but did not reach the ground. A hundred weapons, as if the mere sound of that hated name had power to call them from their concealment, gleamed fiercely in the red glare: then arose that eager, fearful shout which tells of the descent of an enraged multitude upon its victim, followed by one and only one sharp, ringing cry of agony. A moment more of silence, and then again the thundering shout of satiated

vengeance rent the welkin. Agerinus, satisfied with his work, regained his steed, and seizing the bridle-rein of Burrhus, who as yet seemed stunned by the blow he had received, led the way towards the Nævian gate.

But the exasperated populace had tasted blood, and were not to be satisfied with one victim. During the evening, many of the servants of the Emperor had been observed contributing to the progress of the flames in so open and shameless a manner, as left no doubt of the justice of the charge which Agerinus had been the first to utter in so many words. Once spoken, it was again and again eagerly repeated, and the grief and despair of the citizens, vast numbers of whom had already been rendered homeless by the conflagration, soon changed to rage and a desire for summary vengeance. The cry for retribution, for vengeance, for blood, now arose with appalling distinctness. It was borne aloft and echoed and re-echoed from remote quarters, until all other sounds were overpowered by the terrible accents. And as victim after victim fell beneath the sword or was trampled in the dust, or cast as a sacrifice into the flames, that avenging cry became ever louder, ever deeper, until the butchery threatened to become indiscriminate. In the very midst of the horror and strife however, a new feeling of dread and awe came over the multitude, by the recurrence of the same alarming sounds and convulsive throes which had startled the assembly in the catacombs. Once and again, the vast bosom of the earth quivered, as if about to open and swallow up the devoted city; and then followed the overthrow of massive walls, colonnades and towers whose strength had been

hitherto sufficient to resist the ruin caused by the flames. The immense columns of smoke and dust, based upon a burning sea, the waves of which swept onward, like the resistless tide of the ocean, filled the air and darkened the heavens. Now and then, as the heavy clouds were separated by the wind, a transient glimpse of the Capitol was caught, and as that emblem of the majesty of Rome greeted the eye of the multitude, amidst the earthquake and the fire, it seemed indeed, as if the end of the world were at hand. It was at one of these moments, when the ground was yet trembling with the last and most dreadful convulsion, that a form was seen standing alone upon the great altar before the fane of Evander, whose appearance and gestures were such as to rivet the attention of every beholder. A tall figure, wholly clothed in white, with feet and arms bare, blackened by the smoke and spotted with blood, with pale hollow countenance and long beard ; before it a vast and wrathful sea of human life—behind it the terribly magnificent curtain of cloud and flame ever rolling to the heavens. It seemed a spectral form revealed to proclaim the day of doom. Ere long the bare, shrivelled arm was raised toward the sky, a glow of supernatural excitement lit up the wasted features, and the multitude was awed into silence as the words of warning rolled from his lips.

“In the earthquake and in the fire, look ye for the coming of the Lord ! Behold he toucheth the mountains and they smoke, and the hills flow down like molten wax before the brightness of his presence.”

“It is the Jew, the fierce enemy of Rome !” murmured one of the citizens in deep and stern

tones, "let not the infidel dog exult in our misfortune."

"Wo to the city of pride," Selumiel cried again, and the stir of the multitude was hushed anew as he spake, "wo to the great city of idolatry and blood which has so long persecuted the nations. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm, and the year of his redeemed is come."

"The Jew is leagued with the tyrant to destroy us," shouted the same individual who had before spoken, "let our vengeance fall on all the enemies of Rome."

To this suggestion there was no response. It needed none, for the hour of the aged Jewish convert had come. Heedless of the brief words of warning which some in compassion uttered to save him from the fiery flood which was fast rolling towards the spot he occupied, he continued to pour forth passages of scripture, which an ardent but perverted faith applied to the scene around, until the quick flame, as if it had been a living spirit, darted across the narrow expanse, and shot up in long spires around the sides of the great altar. For a moment his eye rested upon the danger, and then with a triumphant smile, he raised his form to its utmost height and looked towards heaven. A cry of excitement and fear arose from the lips of the crowd as the flame caught the loose drapery of his form—a moment more, and nought was to be discerned but the black, dense smoke, enveloping, as it were, a statue of fire.

"Save thyself, brother," shrieked a Christian, who himself stood on the edge of the flames, "for it is sin thus to court death."

"I court not death," was heard, in hoarse tones,

amidst the darkness, "but it was my duty to speak to this people in the name of the Lord."

"Hither then, if thy strength will suffice—hither."

The idea of a voluntary martyrdom, so questionable, had not, as it seemed, been cherished by Selumiel. But he had not calculated rightly the danger to which, in his misguided zeal, he had exposed himself. He sprang toward the friendly voice, but the distance between them was too great to be achieved by his feeble energies. He fell—and his head smote the base of the altar. With a generous forgetfulness of self, his fellow-disciple rushed into the fire and grasped the inanimate form. But ere he reached his companions, the life had departed. The crowd rolled away from the spot, and the ashes of the departed were soon buried beneath the ruins of Rome.

The course of Metellus and his party was now exposed to little interruption. The gate was passed, and the cool damp air of midnight bathed the burning brow of the senator, and inspired him anew with courage and hope. Scarcely had they reached the Appian way, ere the eye of Burrhus, who had nearly recovered from the effects of the blow he had received, detected the armed servants of Metellus in the distance, pursuing their way to the tomb. Hastily pointing out the welcome sight to his friends, he urged Agerinus forward to give notice of their approach, while the party quickened their pace to join the attendants.

"Everything is silent here," said Piso, as the grove and tower became distinctly visible in the moonlight.

"And undisturbed," quickly answered Metellus,

"thank the gods for a merciful deliverance from fear—my daughter is safe."

"But the German soldiery, my Lord," said Burrhus, casting an anxious glance around the apparently deserted scene, "either the earth has swallowed them, or they are at this moment in the catacombs."

"The soldiers have halted here," shouted Agerinus, "there are prints of iron heels upon the grass, and here," he added, snatching a discolored and trampled riband from the ground—"here is evidence of her we seek."

"Let me look upon it," said Metellus, rushing forward. One glance at the slight article of attire was sufficient to reassure him—"this is not my daughter's—"

He was yet speaking, when the concealed door rolled aside from the entrance of the tomb, and Epicharis sprang into the very centre of the group. Her eye was wild and wandering. The veil had fallen entirely from her brow, her hair was dishevelled, and her raiment stained with blood.

"Once—twice have I smitten him," she cried, "but this arm must yet reach a greater than he. Away, ye will not stop me, for I am but the instrument in the hands of God."

"Speak to me, woman!" exclaimed Metellus, seizing her arm, and endeavoring to fix her wandering glance, "thou comest from the tombs—"

"Detain me not," she replied, hurriedly, "I know what you would ask—she is safe, and comes even now; detain me not, for my work is but half accomplished."

A cry of joy burst from the lips of the patrician and he relaxed his hold upon her garment. He

turned, and in another moment his daughter was in his arms. In the rapture of that moment, all the anxiety, the fatigue, the agony of the past, and the yet pressing peril of the present were forgotten.

"To Baïæ," shouted Burrhus from his full heart, while he folded the tribune to his breast, "to Baïæ, and we shall hear all—"

"And avenge all," said Piso, in a strong tone, dashing a tear from his glowing cheek.

"And avenge all," solemnly repeated Flavius, as he raised his hand toward heaven.

"Swear not," said a low voice in his ear, "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord."

He turned and beheld the pale face of Salome, and all the solemn emotions of the night came thronging back upon his heart. He thought of Dobella, and the resolution to seek him was instantly formed. A few words of explanation sufficed to convey his intention to the party of the patrician.

"Nay," exclaimed Burrhus, with ardor, "this work must be mine."

"It shall be yours," cried Epicharis, "and here are stout hearts for the rescue. But will ye again expose the maiden to the rude grasp of the barbarian? Haste! for I hear the sound of footsteps in the distance. Yonder among the trees waits the chariot of Metellus."

Agerinus, who heard the intimation, sprang to the spot indicated by her gesture. The chariot and horses remained quietly standing where Dobella had left them.

"To Baïæ," again cried Epicharis, "patrician, there is no safety for the maiden but in flight."

Metellus needed no further appeal. With the

assistance of Salome, he placed his daughter in the chariot, and took his seat at her side.

We will not dwell upon the parting between Julia and the tribune. Hasty and few as were the words they spake, they were full of mingled fear and hope. In the future to which they looked forward, there was much to encourage—much more to alarm.

The soldiers, left alone with the armed band, prepared themselves for the remaining duty of the night. The open tomb afforded a safe entrance to the catacombs. The door closed upon their descending forms, and the grove was again left in solitude.

Julia fell upon her father's bosom and found relief in tears. The whole scene through which she had just passed had been so dreadful, that she looked back upon it as upon some horrid dream whose fearful sights she would willingly forget.

"Speak thou, Salome!" she said, as her father anxiously questioned her, "and yet," she added, with a kindling countenance, ere her attendant could reply, "this weakness is wrong, for we have been wonderfully preserved, and this tongue should be the first to speak of the mercies of the Lord."

"Not now—not now, my daughter," interposed the patrician with a smile of tenderness, as he folded her more closely to his bosom. "But we must not forget my charge. This," he said, as he placed the infant in the arms of Salome, "was flung into my arms to-night by a distracted woman."

"Blessed are the merciful," whispered Salome, "for they shall obtain mercy. How beautiful!"

"The care of it shall be our thank-offering for the rescue of this night," said Julia, imprinting a kiss upon the lips of the child, "until we can restore

it to its mother. And now, my father, I have strength for the tale."

She related all the events of the night, from the time of her departure for the catacombs, to the fearful scenes of the strife and the rescue—the solemn baptismal service—the unexpected appearance of the tribune—the threatening figure and warning voice of Selumiel—the fierce onset of the soldiery—the peril of Dobella, and the fall of Tigellinus.

Gloomy forebodings of the future filled the heart of Metellus as the evidence of the deep-laid villainy of the favorite of Nero unfolded itself in the narrative of his daughter. The revelations of the scene through which he himself had passed, left no doubt upon his mind of the agency of the Emperor and his instruments in the destruction of the city. His thoughts recurred to his conversation with Piso, and the evils of conspiracy and revolution seemed infinitely less dreadful than the endurance of tyranny so bloody and atrocious. He hesitated no longer as to his own course in the struggle which was approaching. Every consideration of patriotism, of humanity, of justice, called for the overthrow of the despot.

"Fear not, my daughter," he said, as the last words of the narrative trembled upon her lips, "the gods have shielded thee in this great peril—we will look boldly for the protection of heaven for the future."

"I do not fear," she replied, "for I know in whom I have trusted. I have learned to repose upon one who faints not, neither is weary, in the care of his people, and the first prayer of my heart

is, that thou, my father, mayest know him as the one only living and true God."

"The time will come, beloved mistress," whispered Salome in her ear, "we have looked for it—we have prayed for it. The time will come, when all thou lovest shall confess the name of Jesus."

The red hues of the summer morning had already tinged the east before they arrived at Baiæ. Afar to the north and west they saw the horizon darkened with the smoke of the yet burning city—but they had reached a home of safety and of peace.

BOOK THE THIRD.

MARTYRDOM.

——Farewell ! for heaven I quit you,
But yet, nor you, nor these my loved companions,
Once in the twilight dance and morning song,
Though ye are here to hymn my death, not you
Can I forsake without a bleeding spirit.

MILMAN.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

BAIÆ THE BEAUTIFUL.

———But as the earthly bride
Lingers upon the threshold of her home,
And through the mist of parting tears surveys
The chamber of her youth, even so have I
With something of a clinging fondness look'd
Upon the flowers and trees of lovely Daphne.
THE MARTYR OF ANTIOCH.

Summer faded into autumn, and still the groves of Baiæ the beautiful retained their greenness and bloom. To the heat and splendor of the brilliant August days, succeeded the softer glow of sweet September, and the frequent rains left a renewed freshness upon the grass and the leaves, not unlike that which, months ago, had been awakened by the genial breath of spring.

That mild sun-light of early autumn, how dreamily it sleeps upon the avenues of the park! The groves and fountain-arbors are softened into loveliness by its presence, and it sleeps, like a beautiful spirit, upon the grotto floor, amid roseate shells and transparent mother-of-pearl. What though the

verdure has begun to fade upon the topmost boughs of the forest trees, and the low menacing wind sweeps ever and anon, like the first melancholy strain of the dirge of nature, through the woods that crown the mountain side. Nature is still lovely—lovelier for all these gentle, silent changes. The soul clings to her only the more steadily for all her sweet inconstancy. She is a mistress in whose service the heart never sickens. Clouds and sunshine, winds and dews, the transient gloom, and the returning brightness, the glittering, boundless firmament, bright with its myriad orbs shining on our transient earth journey; shining into our hearts as some revelation of the Infinite, or veiled in gloom and leaden darkness, as a curtain behind which the storms are gathering: *all* are beautiful; all render not the face of nature the less enchanting, *each* imparts some grace, which only rivets the ties by which we are bound to her, the more strongly. Such is the blessing which yet lingers with us, which God vouchsafes and continues to the “pure of heart,” the blessing wherewith he comforts his children, while they are yet toiling and striving, weak by nature, yet strong and hopeful through grace, to work out their salvation. “I see my God in nature,” says the pious Herder, “and I love my God through all the revelations of nature. O, brother, if this beautiful, wonderful earth, with her winter brightness, and her summer balm speaks not to thy heart, recalls not the words of him, who, on earth, spake to thee as a God, telling thee that thou wert and art loved of heaven;—I pity thee, nay more, I weep for thee.”

The reader will follow us to one of those plea-

sant arbors of which we have slightly spoken in a former chapter, a favorite retreat during the warm hours of the morning. As we enter we notice how closely the luxuriant foliage has entwined itself around the tall and graceful trellices, leaving scarcely an opening for the jet of the fountain, which is broken at the roof, and scatters itself in the finest spray upon the leaves. How cool, how reviving, is the bubbling of the water from its crystal depths—with what a pleasant sound of freshness the big drops fall into the marble basin. The song of the birds we hear not, save now and then a brief lively strain, breaking out fitfully, and as suddenly hushed. Here and there a ray of sunshine steals through the openings of the foliage, and sleeps upon the grass, and the low hum of insects, as their wings glance in the light, steals pleasantly upon the ear.

We hear voices, subdued as if in respect to the Sabbath stillness of the hour and the scene—the low musical accents of woman, blending with the deeper and stronger tones of a manly voice. Their forms are dimly seen amidst the drapery of the garden walks—and now they enter the arbor—it is Julia of Baiæ leaning upon the arm of her lover.

The hue of the rose upon her cheek is scarcely visible now—and her eye, at all times soft and tender, has lost somewhat of the light which shone there when she was first presented to the reader. There is no shadow upon her brow, but one cannot help thinking that there is a melancholy expression in the countenance. And well there may be; since that summer evening Julia of Baiæ has suffered much, has learned much. Then her life-dream was many-hued but vague and aimless; the

heart had been touched lightly, but the *soul* slumbered within her. She saw but the beautiful earth with its flowers and trees, and sunshine, its glittering dew-drops and crystal waters, with the blue star-paved firmament overhead, and the carpet of green beneath her feet. And over it all, there was a soft veil of mystery, which her young eyes sought to pierce in vain. There were aspirations in her soul which she knew not how to interpret—a sense of something which she had not, and which nature, nor philosophy, nor poetic faith could supply; a want which the enjoyment of all earth's pleasant things supplied not.

But now, how changed! and how complete, how satisfying the change. The eyes of her mind were enlightened, and the light of the glorious gospel had revealed, at once, the object of life, and the path of duty. The veil had been withdrawn from nature—she saw the world reposing in the smile of a reconciled God. She felt the nobleness of the privilege of living for Christ—and a spirit of more than mortal energy impelled her to seek for other souls the same gifts of hope and blessedness which filled her own. The aspect of danger had already revealed itself to all who professed the Christian name—but the heroism of Christian faith had revealed itself also. The reality of martyrdom came, but it found the disciples unshrinking and prepared.

“You bring sad tidings, Flavius,” she said, as they seated themselves within the arbor, “tidings more strange than sad perhaps, for to such an one as Dobella, the death of the martyr is no terror. For him ‘to die is gain.’”

“This,” replied the tribune, despondingly, “les-

sens not the guilt and vileness of those whose work it is."

"Nay, Flavius," she answered, lifting her beautiful eyes to heaven, "our times are in the hands of God, in his hands also are the hearts of kings. Who knows what glory he may see fit to work out for his people, through even the unworthy Nero and his instruments—"

"Pardon me," Julia," said Flavius, "if I cannot yet look upon this matter as a Christian should. I cannot see the noble falling before the base by such means and on such pretexts, without feeling the indignation of a Roman."

"And yet," replied Julia, "it is our duty to pray for those in authority, even when we feel the rod of their oppression. Doubtless, when the ends of his Providence are answered, God will open the way for our deliverance."

"It is a noble belief," said the tribune with a doubtful smile, "all too noble for these evil times."

"If the days upon which we have fallen are evil," she added warmly, "are we not here to make them better. To what purpose has the Redeemer chosen us as his own, if not that we may let our light so shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our father who is in heaven."

"And thou, dear Julia," replied her lover, a shade of sadness stealing over his brow as he gazed fondly upon her animated countenance, "and thou, perhaps, would'st not shrink from suffering, from death, in confessing the God of the Nazarenes."

"Such would be my duty," answered the maiden quietly, but firmly, "and such, should I be called to it, would be my blessed privilege."

The tribune sighed and cast his eyes to the ground. His bosom was full of dark and conflicting emotions. The feelings of a patriot, the indignation of a high and virtuous mind, his solemn pledges to his fellow-conspirators, were now all brought into contact with those new principles of gentleness and submission inculcated by the religion of Jesus. The heart of the soldier had been touched, prejudice and error had given place to conviction and love of the truth—but the surrender of the spirit—the self-trusting spirit—had not been made. There needed yet the discipline of sorrow, the still small voice of the Spirit from out the whirlwind, the earthquake and the fire of earthly trial—the shattering of every fair fabric of worldly hope, and amidst that ruin the revelation of the true glory of faith and the sufficiency of God.

The eyes of the maiden were bent anxiously upon his countenance, as the shadows of the gloomy thoughts within, passed, one after another, over his features, like the shadows of clouds across the surface of open waters. To her, also, it was an hour of temptation; for the pure, earnest, devoted affection of a heart which loves once and forever, had been all given up to him, believing that heaven would sanction the surrender. Could she find it in her heart—now that the bloody and relentless persecutions of Nero seemed to have filled up the appalling measure of his crimes,—could she she find it in her heart to stay the arm which was raised to free the world of such an enemy to God and man? In human view, the regeneration of the state, the safety of all who were dearest to her heart, and more than all, the life of the infant church hung upon the overthrow of the tyrant.

Her father, her uncle, her betrothed, were all known to be obnoxious to Nero and his favorites—and for herself, what could secure protection from the pursuit of Tigellinus! And there was something whispering at her heart, of happiness with him she loved—the promise of domestic peace and joy which should succeed to the brief tempest of revolution. She trembled; and for the time the weakness of the woman threatened to endanger the devotedness of the Christian disciple. Then the emphatic words of the inspired Apostle, came back to her memory, as a voice from heaven, to guide her in the bewildering situation in which the Providence of God had placed her. A quick pang shot to her heart at the recollection—but it was the pang of resolved and patient submission. She felt that the hardest earthly sacrifice was before her—

“Julia, my own Julia,” exclaimed the tribune, seizing her hand and pressing it to his lips, “it must be. Heaven and earth call aloud for the sword of the avenger. By every tie by which I am bound to your uncle—to your father: by every hope which I have cherished in you; by every sacred duty to the empire, it must be.”

Her cheek grew suddenly pale, her lip quivered, but the reluctant words died upon her tongue.

“Say, dearest,” continued Flavius, with fervor, “say that you can approve, that you can bless the effort. Give me but one word of encouragement, and it will be as a nerve of iron to my heart.”

“Surely, surely, Flavius,” she faltered, while overcome with her emotion, her head fell upon his shoulder, “this trial is a heavy one. I cannot—must not—betray the religion of Jesus.”

“Upon me be the guilt,” he replied, “if guilt

there be. But I will not endanger your peace by urging your approval. Say that you will not frown upon me—that you will love me still.”

“I do say it,” she answered, “whatever may come, be it suffering, or chains, or martyrdom, this heart will not cease to love you—these lips to pray for you. O, Flavius,” she added, with an upward glance, in which hope seemed brightening into faith, “how have I loved to think that our names were written in the book of life.”

“Thou shalt guide me,” exclaimed her lover, “thou shalt lead me in the way to heaven. May the God whom you serve, the God in whom I too believe, pardon me, if I err in the path of duty I have chosen.”

“Look not to me,” the maiden answered, “look not to any human thing for direction. Lean not, beloved, upon an arm of flesh. In God is our strength, and we must seek it there. Let us then go to Him, who hears the prayer of the troubled and burdened heart; to Him whose spirit is understanding and strength. It is not in man to direct his steps. And for thee, also, Flavius, the way is open to the throne of grace.”

“I will seek it, Julia,” he answered, “as I have not sought it yet. Often in the silence of the night, in the solitude of my chamber, I have dwelt on those midnight scenes, and the strong heart has melted within me like the heart of a child. But these distracting fears, these dreadful forebodings will return again. I behold the ruin which hangs over us all, and the darkest vision, beloved of my heart! is that in which I behold *thee* summoned to the question, or more horrible still, a prey to the atrocious wickedness of Nero.”

“Fear not for me,” she replied, as an earnest and confident smile illuminated her beautiful fea-

tures, "He in whose mercy I trust—to whose guidance I commend *thee*, will temper the wind to the shorn lamb."

The countenance of her lover grew bright with the same generous enthusiasm. He saw how much the appeal to heaven had strengthened that pure young spirit for the trying hour. And peace came also to his own heart. Again he pressed her hand to his lips, and arose.

"Go, then, Flavius," she said, but seek, ere you act, the grotto of the recluse of Pausilippo. If thou wouldst be a Christian, he will speak to thy soul with power. And remember, that our God is above all. Without him not a sparrow falls to the ground. If it is His will that the sun of our earthly love should set in clouds and darkness, He can unite us again where tyranny, and sin, and parting are no more. Farewell then, Flavius—farewell—my trust is in heaven."

"In heaven *I* will trust," replied the tribune—"for I feel that heaven alone can aid us:—and is not my work the work of heaven? But you say well, Julia! I will seek the holy man. Yet talk not thus, dearest, of parting, such gloomy words do but depress the spirit."

"Depress it," repeated the maiden with tears, "depress it, Flavius! O what would our hope be if we could not look forward to the bright and holy world beyond the grave; for thee, for me, there is rest; there is bliss there—"

Her words were arrested by a voice which seemed to float upon the air—so soft—so clear—it might have been the voice of an angel. And the words of the exquisite strain sank into the hearts of both, as if they had been, indeed, words of promise from the skies.

What means yon blaze on high ?
 The empyrean sky
 Like the rich veil of some proud fane is rending.
 I see the star-paved land,
 Where all the angels stand,
 Even to the highest height in burning rows ascending.
 Some with their wings dispread,
 And bowed the stately head,
 As on some mission of God's love departing
 Like flames from midnight conflagrations starting ;
 Behold the appointed messengers are they,
 And nearest earth they wait to waft our souls away.

Higher and higher still,
 More lofty statuares fill
 The jasper courts of the everlasting dwelling
 Cherub and seraph pace
 The illimitable space
 While sleep the folded plumes from their white
 shoulders swelling,
 From all the harping throng,
 Bursts the tumultuous song,
 Like the unceasing sounds of cataracts pouring
 Hosanna o'er Hosanna louder soaring ;
 That faintly echoing down to earthly ears
 Hath seemed the concert sweet of the harmonious
 spheres.

Beyond ! ah who is there
 With the white snowy hair ?
 'Tis he, 'tis he the Son of man appearing !
 At the right hand of one
 The darkness of whose throne
 The sun-ey'd seraph Host behold with awe and fearing.
 O'er him the rainbow springs,
 And spreads its emerald wings,
 Down to the glassy sea his loftiest seat o'er-arching,
 Hark—thunders from his throne like steel-clad
 armies marching,
 The Christ ! the Christ commands us to his home !
 Jesus, Redeemer, Lord, we come, we come, we
 come ! (6)

"How beautiful," exclaimed the tribune, as the
 music ceased.

“Such is the kingdom of our God—such, Flavius, the home to which we look forward. Said not Dobella truly, that for the Christian “to die is gain.”

He replied not, but gazed at her for a moment in silence. Then, as if afraid to trust himself longer in her presence, he uttered a brief farewell and departed. In the next moment Salome glided with noiseless step into the arbor, and seated herself at the feet of her mistress.

CHAPTER II.

THE GATHERING STORM.

To die—'t is dreary,
To die a villain's death, that's yet a pang,
But it must down. I have so steeped my soul
In the bitter ashes of true penitence
That they have put on a delicious savor
And all is halcyon quiet—all within.

FAZIO.

"I bring news from Rome, my mistress—tidings of mingled sadness and joy. Many saints have already won the bright crown—many more, imprisoned or accused, look forward with patient hope to the hour of martyrdom."

"And what of Varus Dobella?" asked Julia, almost fearful to hear the answer to the question.

"He dies by the lions, at the approaching show," replied Salome. "The accusation of Tigellinus is all powerful, and he is charged with the deepest share in the burning of the city. The words of the aged christian, Selumiel, who himself fell in the flames, have been perverted to color the accusation—"

"And Dobella—"

"Will die as a Christian should, though he boldly and publicly exposes the falsehood of the alle-

gation. Nero will hasten his work, because the people begin to murmur. All believe that the burning of Rome was his own act; and although the prejudices of the people have driven them fiercely into the persecution, they will not look tamely upon such injustice towards the noblest citizens. They will not even believe that Dobella is a Christian!"

"I feel, Salome," said Julia, looking anxiously at the Judæan, "that Dobella will fall—that it is a sacrifice which God will approve. The superstitious rage of the people, in the excitement of the shows, will be stronger than their love for the right."

"Happy—thrice happy," said the other fervently, "is he who is chosen of heaven to die for the name of Jesus. Happy, if we suffer with him that we may also reign with him. Thou, also, my mistress, may'st be called to this glory."

"May the Spirit of God strengthen me for the hour when it comes," said the maiden, clasping her hands and looking up to heaven. "If it is his will—His will be done."

"Thou hast spoken with the tribune, my mistress," said Salome, after a pause in which both seemed lost in thought, "how stands his purpose now?"

"Alas, Salome!" replied her mistress, "his mind is still strongly set upon that doubtful work. Bitter indeed, has been the trial of my spirit within this last hour—but I have felt how blessed a thing it is to cast even that harrassing care upon God. Hast thou seen the deluded Epicharis?"

"I have, and the prayers of the faithful have been offered for her, but the evil spirit is still strong

at her heart. How dreadful to think of a soul thus lost !”

“ Did she speak of my father !”

“ Your father has joined the conspirators, and his example has brought over numbers of the noblest and strongest. She has told me more. Her addresses to Volusius Proculus, were revealed by that abandoned man to the emperor. She was cited to answer, and confronted with her accuser, but eluded the charge by her self-possession and undaunted firmness. Nevertheless, the suspicions of Nero are aroused, and the partisans of Piso have determined to hasten the catastrophe. They meet this night at his villa. Your father will be with them. Doubtless they will act with vigor, for the death of Burrhus has added the last drop to the cup of vengeance.”

“ The death of Burrhus,” exclaimed the maiden feebly, “ Gracious heaven !”

“ He died, as is said,” replied the Judæan, “ by poison administered by the hands of the Emperor, and the draught was prepared by Poppæa.”

“ Alas for the brave and the true-hearted ! Surely, Salome, the bolt of God’s wrath must soon be revealed to avenge such crimes.”

“ Nero also will be judged on high,” replied the slave : “ the office of Burrhus has been divided between Fenius Rufus and Tigellinus. The former has joined the conspirators, and vows that Piso shall ere long, sit on the imperial throne—the latter has accused your father of treason against the state, and waits only for his death, to cast you into prison as a Christian.”

“ Salome !” replied the agitated maiden, not without tears, as the words of her attendant summoned

up before her mind the full malignity of the designs of Tigellinus. "I feel that my days are numbered. But I will make one effort to save my father: meet it is that the child should offer up her life in sacrifice to heaven for him who gave her birth."

"Alas! my mistress!" replied the Judæan in alarm, "what is thy purpose?"

"I may not tell thee till I have sought guidance and strength in prayer. Enough that I fear my own heart—but the Spirit of God can give more than is sufficient for the task. Leave me now, Salome: we will meet again at the evening hour."

Julia retired to her chamber and spent many hours in prayer. In the meantime, the arrows of affliction were already drawn from the quiver, and the storm was gathering with fearful rapidity.

CHAPTER III.

THE BANQUET HALL OF PISO.

———Ye that move,
Shrouded in secrecy as in a robe
And gloom of deepest midnight, the vaunt courier
Of your dread presence! Will ye not reveal,
Will ye no. one compassionate glimpse vouchsafe
By what dark instruments 't is now your charge
To save the city?—————

Accursed happiness!
And will he set my childless misery up
To be a wider gaze? My Lord, I'm here.

MILMAN.

At the villa of Piso the hour of the banquet had passed, and the silence that reigned in the apartment where the guests were assembled, proclaimed that the season for serious deliberation had come.

The suspicious circumstances attending the death of Burrhus, the alarming tidings that Epicharis had been summoned before the Emperor to confront Volusius Proculus, her accuser; the unwonted reserve of Nero towards Seneca and Lucan, were indications of the most alarming nature—and all present felt that success and safety depended upon immediate action.

The accession of Fenius Rufus to the party of the conspirators was altogether unlooked for, and inspired renewed confidence. He had come, almost unsought, in a threatening hour, when the hearts of the bravest began to sink at the difficulties which boded a doubtful termination to the enterprize. Burrhus had fallen beneath the suspicious cruelty of the tyrant, and Tigellinus exalted into greater power by his fall. The high-minded and politic Vespasian had been sent on a public mission, to a distance from Rome; Dobella was imprisoned, and Metellus was threatened. The timid, time-serving Seneca, although pledged to their support, stood somewhat aloof from their deliberations as the crisis approached, and Epicharis, the inspiration of whose untiring zeal and enthusiasm had been felt by all, had well-nigh betrayed the whole by her mistaken confidence in Proculus.

Fenius Rufus was the first to speak. He arose from his couch, and stood before Piso.

"It is now," he said, "our first, our pressing duty to concentrate our deliberations upon the means of executing our purpose without delay. Whatever your determinations may be, my friends, this hand is ready."

"It is evident," replied Metellus, in a voice whose every tone begat confidence in the minds of the doubting—"It is evident that delay is now our worst enemy. Let the blow be speedy that it may be certain."

The remark arrested the steps of Lucan, as he paced the floor with hasty step and angry brow. He advanced and laid his hand upon the tunic of Scevinus, the senator.

"Holds your purpose yet, my Lord?" he asked with a significant look at Flavius, who reclined with vacant eye and thoughtful brow upon the adjoining couch.

"It holds," replied Scevinus.

"Then hear me, friends," added the poet, "The Emperor will be present here to-morrow, at our convivial party. He will come divested of his guards, and unencumbered by the parade of state. Let the blow fall *then*."

The conspirators looked at each other for a moment in silence. A flush mounted to the cheek of Piso as he encountered the calm, enquiring eye of Metellus, but he made no reply.

"Lucan says well," said Scevinus, coming forward and drawing a dagger from the folds of his robe. "Behold this weapon which I have dedicated to the cause of liberty. With this, if you will confer the honorable appointment, I will pierce the heart of the tyrant, and to-morrow's sun shall be the last that shall set upon his crime."

"And what says Piso," asked Lucan, as his eye rested in some suspicion upon the troubled countenance of his host.

"I honor and I would emulate your noble zeal, my lords," replied Piso, "but I cannot consent to the step thus suddenly proposed, not," he added, as he observed the sinister glance of the excited and fickle poet, whose bravery at the best, all knew to be of the questionable sort, "not that my heart falters, or that I doubt the success of the design. But I speak as a Roman to whom the gods of hospitality are yet sacred. The world must never say that the table of Piso was imbrued with blood, and

that the hospitable divinities were violated here by the murder of a prince, however detested for his atrocious deeds. Say I well, Metellus?"

"Such were indeed a baseness," calmly answered the patrician, "which would not fail to fall heavily upon our own heads in the indignation of all virtuous Romans. And besides this, Baia should not be the scene of this deed. Rome only should witness his fall."

"Rome," exclaimed Piso with enthusiasm, "is indeed the proper theatre for such a catastrophe. The scene should be in his own palace, that haughty mansion built with the spoils of plundered citizens. (7). The blow for liberty would be still more noble before an assembly of the people. The actions of men who dare nobly for the public should be seen by the public eye."

"The games of the circus are approaching," said Metellus, "let us there work out our deliverance, for although, since the conflagration, Nero has hidden himself from the people through fear—he will not fail to attend his favorite diversions, and in that scene of gaiety, access to his person will not be difficult."

The proposal of Metellus was received with applause, for all placed thorough reliance upon his wisdom, and the integrity of his motives.

"Hear me then, my friends," he continued, "for the attainment of this virtuous object, I will even stoop to seeming baseness. I will beseech the Emperor on my knees, to let me know the full extent of the accusations which, as I learn, are brought against me. Then, Scevinus," he added, turning to the senator, "then the sword will do its work."

"A work in which we of the sword," exclaimed Fenius Rufus to Flavius, "will aid with nerves strung to desperation by the memory of a thousand crimes."

The tribune thought of his interview with Julia, and of his intended visit to the recluse of Pausilippo, as he replied, firmly,

"It is the will of Heaven!"

"One word more, ere we part, my lords," said Metellus, "we shall have need, when our work is done, of the prudent heart and the strong hand to preserve us from the horrors of anarchy. There is one among us," he added, advancing, and taking the hand of Piso, "whom destiny and our own regard alike call to the Imperial dignity."

"Long live Piso," was the unanimous response, "long live the noble and the brave as the Father of the Empire?"

"You do me too much honor, my lords," replied Piso, with a burning cheek, "were my voice heard in the choice, Julius Metellus—"

"No more, Piso," said the consul elect, as a languid smile played over his serious features, "I know what you would say—what must be left unsaid. I must even lay down the honors of the office to which the people have lately called me. My best efforts, my prayers, will always be at the service of Rome, but I must continue to serve her as a citizen."

"Noble Metellus!" exclaimed Piso with genuine enthusiasm, clasping the hand of his friend warmly, "Would that Rome had many such as thou."

"She hath worthier sons," replied Metellus, as a tear of sympathy, excited by the emotion of all

around him, rolled down his cheek, "worthier to rule, but, I trust, not more willing to lay down life and all but honor in her service. But enough, if our conference is ended, my duty calls me elsewhere."

The particulars of the plot were soon adjusted, and the conspirators dispersed quietly to their homes.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOW IN THE CLOUD.

So wanderers ever fond and true,
Look homeward through the evening sky,
Withott a streak of Heaven's soft blue
To aid affection's dreaming eye.

The wanderer seeks his native bower,
And we will look and long for thee,
And thank thee for each trying hour,
Wishing, not struggling, to be free.

KEBLE.

IN the mellow, autumnal twilight, Metellus and the tribune approached the quiet villa, where both would willingly have consented to spend the remaining years of life apart from the stir and turmoil of public intrigues and the toils of state. Their way lay along the broad open avenue which terminated the ground on the east and descended to the water-side, between its double row of trees, among whose fading foliage the breeze of evening was awakening music in harmony with the hour and the scene. The bosom of the bay was crowded with barges, as if the luxurious citizens prized the enjoyments of their retreat the more as the season drew nigh in which they were to be deprived of them. The western firmament was yet tinged

with the glory of the sunset, and the evening star shone with a gentle lustre through the light crimson veil that floated upon that serene sky.

The subject of their conversation was of absorbing interest to both—the safety and happiness of her with whom the heart of the one was linked by the holiest and strongest ties of parental affection, and to whom the other was bound by ties equally strong and equally sacred.

“Should I fall, Flavius,” said Metellus, “aim not to avenge my death, but seek with Julia some home of safety where the arm of the tyrant cannot reach you. Swear to me, by the gods you hold most sacred, that you will protect my daughter.”

“I do swear,” replied the tribune with fervor, “although no oath can bind me stronger than my love for your daughter now binds me. I swear by the God of the Christians, that so long as life shall remain, it shall be dedicated to her.”

“Think not,” my son,” answered Metellus affectionately, pressing the arm of the tribune closer to his own, “that I doubt your affection for my child, or your honor. But when all other means have failed, there may yet be safety in flight.”

“All other means will not fail,” replied the other with the generous confidence of youth, “there is a God above us who will protect the right. Doubt not, my lord, of the issue.”

“I have learned to doubt the issue of everything earthly,” said the patrician with a melancholy smile, “and my heart loses its strength when I think of my daughter. Hast thou marked, Flavius, how strangely the doctrines of this new religion have affected her?”

"I have, my lord, and I wonder not at its power. I too believe in Christ."

"Thou,"—replied Metellus,' with unfeigned amazement, for, in the slight regard which he had given to what he deemed nothing more than an attractive and harmless superstition, he had almost entirely separated himself from all effectual acquaintance with Christianity—"thou, Flavius," he repeated, "this is strange, indeed!"

"It is not so," said Flavius, "after what mine own ears have heard, after what mine own eyes have seen. I was present at the burial of a Christian—I was present at the baptism of your daughter. My reason bows to this faith, and my heart embraces it as a true revelation from heaven."

The words of the tribune awoke in the heart of Metellus a new and grateful emotion—a desire to know something more of that system which seemed destined to subdue all minds that were brought in contact with its doctrines. Flavius saw that such was his feeling and supplied the knowledge as far as he was able. The brow of the patrician slightly darkened as he detailed the conversation with Dobella at the tomb, but as the narrative proceeded, and the great doctrine of the soul's immortality dawned more clearly upon his mind, in the language of the Christian books and the hymn in the funeral rites, his interest deepened, and all his faculties soon became thoroughly absorbed. His thoughts dwelt upon it after the words of his companion had ceased to fall upon his ear, and memory vividly recalled the earnest and tender spirit in which his daughter had often sought to win his serious regard to the religion of Christ.

The spirit of God—the still small voice which is able to speak to the heart by the instrumentality of means which to human view are all inadequate—the Spirit whose work is accomplished as effectually by the feeblest announcement of the truth, as by the overpowering evidence of miracle, or the splendors of Pentecostal manifestation, had not been denied to the prayer of faith. A heavenly light was dawning in the soul of the Roman noble at the very hour when his daughter knelt with the faithful Salome, in supplications for *him*, at the throne of grace.

As they drew near to the portico, they heard voices singing. Bright rays of a lamp streamed through the open doors of the atrium, and they distinguished the following words, sung, without accompaniment, to a simple strain of music.

HYMN AT THE LIGHTING OF THE LAMPS. (8)

I.

At the balmy close of day:
While the twilight fades away
Ere the stars with trembling gleam,
Cast their image on the stream
Be our praise to thee addressed
Father, Son, and Spirit blest.

II.

As we watch the evening light
Softly melting into night,
As the kindled lamp-light falls
Brightly on the chamber walls,
Emblems faint of Light Divine,
God in heaven, the praise be thine.

III.

Thee in glorious hymns we praise,
Voice and heart, to thee we raise:
Thou wilt hear our feeble hymn

Mid the songs of Cherubim
Ever rolling round thy throne,
Great Jehovah, three in one.

IV.

Bounteous Lord of heavenly light
Shine upon our mortal night,
Son of God ! our soul's life-giver
From the death of sin deliver
Us thy children, while we sing
Praise to thee, eternal King !

They stood together, in silence, at the entrance of the portico until the voices ceased. They advanced, and the light, graceful form of Julia issued from the court.

There was a sweet serenity in her countenance which told how thoroughly her heart had been engaged by the elevated sentiments of the hymn they had heard. But no eye but His to whose service she had dedicated herself, saw the noble and holy purpose of self devotion that was in her heart. She had laid it before Him in prayer, and her prayer had brought an answer of peace.

The succeeding hour was spent in conversation, on what had now become a theme of interest to all. With what grateful feelings did the young and fervent disciple witness the evident impression which had been made upon the mind and heart of her father. How earnestly, and yet with what sweet and winning grace, did she respond to every inquiry which his aroused attention suggested !

"Bring me those writings, my daughter," said Metellus, after Flavius had withdrawn, "I may say to you what you tell me Agrippa said to the Apostle, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'"

"Would to God, my father," she replied, as she

drew the scroll from her bosom, and placed it in his hand, "would to God you were not almost, but altogether a Christian."

The patrician smiled tenderly upon her, as he imprinted a parting kiss upon her cheek, and then retired to his chamber, to seek refuge from the anxieties that oppressed him on the perusal of the Christian Scriptures, Julia sought her couch with tears of grateful joy, for she saw *the bow in the cloud*.

CHAPTER V.

THE GROTTO OF PAUSILIPPO.

Question me not !

——— My duty bids me do it ;
Whence this bold enterprise, by whom conceiv'd
And what the means you use ? It seems, indeed,
Of aspect plausible, and well matur'd,
But will it stand the test of sober reason ?

BEAUMONT.

IN fulfilment of his promise to Julia, the tribune pursued his way towards Mount Pausilippo to seek the counsel of the aged Christian, whose name, from several years' solitary residence there, had become almost identified, among the adherents of the new faith, with the spot he inhabited. Peculiar sanctity was attached to his character from the fact that he was reported to have been among those who had been permitted to attend upon the Saviour during his earthly ministry. The gifts of prophecy and miracle were said yet to linger with him, and he was regarded with a veneration scarcely inferior to that which was accorded to the Apostles themselves. Called in mature manhood to the duties of an evangelist, he had devoted all his energies to the work, through suffering, peril, and per-

secution ; and now, although extreme in age, he yet retained the ardor of his early faith, and the self-denying activity of his early zeal, and remained a counsellor and an example to the tried and suffering disciples.

“ Yet wherefore should I seek this man ? ” was a question which the tribune asked himself more than once during his solitary journey, “ Am I not already pledged to this business ? and I would not pause in its execution. ”

But he remembered the earnest look, the sweet enthusiasm, the solemn appeal of his beloved, and quickened his step. “ I will on, ” he said, “ were it but for thy sake, Julia ; I will speak with the venerable man. His wisdom may direct to the means of rescue for the imprisoned Dobella, or at least aid me in gaining access to him. ”

He walked on beneath the soft clear moonlight, and the great Night around him seemed holier than the Day. The harsh and jarring voices of the world's strife seemed all left behind him. He was alone with his own soul and with his God. He looked up to the glorious, silent heavens, and, for the moment, forgot his dangers, his anxieties, his fears. Never before had he so felt the power of the truth that the all-seeing eye was upon him and his. Never before had he so thoroughly realized the independence of the human soul of all that is finite and transient. The stars, as they looked down upon his path seemed to whisper peace and hope to his spirit—they were types of that which changes not, types of the immortality to which he had learned to aspire—of the Heaven to which the finger of faith directed him. The voice of the wind among the olive groves seemed to breathe of

that unseen country of life and rest—and on the bosom of the waters, and far down in their blue mysterious depths, lay, as it were, the shadow of that eternity, which is unchangeable, limitless, serene.

He drew near to Pausilippo. The groves, the marble-paved terraces, the villas, were bathed with the silvery flood of light, and the frequent statues stood up around him as the silent representatives of an age that had passed away. Here a colossal figure of Jupiter Olympus, with passionless features, calm majestic brow, and cold smile, looked down upon him from amidst its grove of brilliant evergreen—there the Grecian Minerva, as the impersonation of intellectual beauty, confronted him with her lofty brow. On one hand, the graceful figure of the Paphian goddess was finely contrasted with the airy form of Diana on the other—and close at hand were the muses waiting around Apollo, as if to catch the inspiration from his lute.

“Vain images of that higher life to which the human soul aspires,” said the tribune aloud, as he paused for a moment on his way—“the time shall come when such things as ye shall be all that is left to attest the reign of the old religion. How poor, how lifeless, is error, when once the heart has thrilled to the voice of the truth. These beautiful fictions of a faith which lives no more—a faith so strangely blending the sensual and transient with man’s unquenchable longings after the spiritual and the enduring, shall vanish away like spirits of the night before the day which is approaching.”

His last words were repeated in a subdued but firm tone by one behind. He turned and beheld Epicharis.

“ You say well, Subrius Flavius—the *day is approaching*, and there is work for us both ere it dawn. Hasten to seek the holy man—for there will be need of the sword ere another sun shall rise.”

“ Thou knowest, then,” replied the tribune, “ my purpose to visit the Christian of Pausilippo ?”

“ I came from my prison to warn the daughter of Metellus of the approaching danger, and from her lips I learned thine errand. But it boots not, tribune ! Thou canst not now retrace thy steps if thou wouldst ; at this moment the Prætorian cohorts are treading the shores of Baïæ, and Piso and Scævius are the objects of their search.”

“ Woman !” exclaimed Flavius in a strong tone of incredulity, while the paleness of his cheek betrayed his apprehension, “ you jest with my feelings.”

“ Jest !” repeated Epicharis in a voice half scornful, half indignant, “ it were but a poor jest to sport with the danger which threatens us all—with the bitter, maddening delay of our hopes—with the agony which is *here*,” she added, laying her hand upon her breast, “ until this work be accomplished. But go forward, and do thine errand.”

“ My errand here is done,” replied the tribune, “ if what thou sayest be true.”

“ Behold, then !” replied Epicharis, “ He comes to thee : holy father, this is the soldier of whom I spake.”

The aged man approached and gazed upon the tribune with a countenance in which mournful sympathy was the predominant expression

“ It is too late, my son,” he said, “ I have been apprized of this visit, and of your object in seeking me. Soldier ! the disciples of the Redeemer war

not with carnal weapons—neither can his cause be promoted by violence.”

“But our wrongs, venerable man,” Flavius began.

“The Lord hath said, ‘vengeance is mine and I will recompense.’ Let your appeal be to the justice of Rome—to the Senate—but forbear to raise the sword. Yet, it is too late, as I have said, even for this. The devices of the conspirators have come to nought—I have sought thee for another purpose. The maiden thou lovest is in danger of falling a prey to licentious and cruel men. She is already accused as a Christian and to-morrow will be cast into prison. Go thou to the Emperor, and demand her rescue with that of Dobella. The oath of a Roman soldier will be sufficient to free them from the false charge which is brought against them. Go—there is yet time for this—”

“For this, and for much more,” said Epicharis, bitterly, “were the heart of Subrius Flavius the heart of a soldier, indeed !”

“Forbear, my daughter,” replied the aged Christian, “this cannot be. God has appointed other issues, and will manifest his glory in the sufferings and constancy of his chosen ones. But to free the brave and the young from unjust persecution is always an acceptable service. Wilt thou undertake this, tribune ?”

“I will,” replied Flavius, “I will first visit the villa of Metellus, lest the blow should have descended already, and then I will seek the Emperor. It may at least delay what it cannot prevent.”

“Dost thou think that the tiger will resign his prey after that he has tasted of blood ?” asked Epicharis, passionately. “Miserable self-deceiver, there is

but one way of escape from the danger, and may heaven nerve thee when that way shall open itself before thee. No, Flavius! when once the prison-doors have closed upon thy friends, let thy hope expire."

The tribune was silent—for the uncertainty and danger of his position pressed heavily upon his mind. Personal fears he had none; but the welfare of the friends so dear, so honored, seemed to depend upon his efforts alone. The aged Christian noticed the cloud upon his brow, and read its meaning.

"Fear not, soldier," he said, "for there is a higher power than man's engaged for those whom thou lovest. Go—do thy duty patiently and bravely, and doubt not the issue. And thou, daughter of misguided zeal," he said, turning to Epicharis, "it is not yet too late for thee to humble thyself at the foot of the cross. Thou hast seen the vanity of the arm of flesh—"

The glow of excitement enkindled again in the eloquent features of the Greek, as she fixed her brilliant eyes upon the countenance of the recluse. It was a glance, not of repentance or regret, but of fixed and inflexible determination.

"The arm of flesh," she said, "is strengthened from on high—it *will* be upheld by the hand of God. There is no faltering *here*—for my heart knows its work. Father! to that day when all earthly things shall be made manifest to the light, I look for my approval and reward. Human praise or censure cannot move me."

"Then may God judge thee in mercy," replied the recluse, "though my voice is too feeble to win thee from thine errors, I will not forget thee in

my prayers. Farewell—my heart tells me that we shall meet again ere many days.”

He raised his hands toward heaven, and spake the words of benediction, while Epicharis and the tribune reverently bowed their heads as he spake. The brief silence which succeeded recalled each to the pressing business of the night.

“Thy way,” said Epicharis, “lies towards the villa of Metellus. Mine conducts me back to my prison. Farewell—and when thou comest into the presence of Nero, take counsel of thine own heart, and be strong to do that which it shall prompt.”

As she spake, she moved from his side and quickly disappeared within the recesses of the wood.

“Did'st thou hear nought, my son?” asked the aged Christian after a few moments, while Flavius lingered in his presence, as if there was something yet unspoken upon his mind. “Methinks mine ear caught but now the sound of many feet upon the highway.”

The tribune slightly changed his position, and stood erect and attentive. It was not long before he was enabled to distinguish the sounds to which his companion alluded. They arose distinctly and regularly above the monotonous murmur of the waters upon the shore and the deep rustling of the exuberant foliage stirred by the night breezes.

“They draw near,” again said the recluse, laying his hand upon the arm of the tribune, “let us retire within the grotto. If there is danger connected with their presence, we may perchance learn how to avoid it. These may be the soldiers of whom the woman spake to us.”

He led the way with a noiseless but firm step to the entrance of a natural grotto, from one side

of which the artificial excavation of the Roman Emperors took its commencement. A descent of a few steps placed them upon the floor of dry and solid rock, which was of equal elevation through the entire area of the chamber. The walls were irregular in height, on one hand rising only a few feet between the floor and the roof, and on the other, stretching upwards behind the heavy curtain of stalactite, in conical openings of various degrees of uniformity. A dim light issuing from a natural recess in the rock, within which were seen a pallet of the mountain moss with a few articles of rustic furniture, designated the place used by the inhabitant of the grotto for the purposes of retirement and devotion. All else was left in the wildness and vacancy of nature.

The tribune looked around him with a curiosity not unmingled with sympathy for one thus entirely cut off from the common enjoyments of life. The age and apparent decrepitude of his companion seemed to demand a habitation less rude and less remote from the presence of those who might minister to his wants, and relieve his infirmities.

“And is it here,” he asked, “that you are compelled to spend the last years of a life of labor and self-devotion? Surely, father, the Christians owe thee a debt of gratitude which such desertion can but feebly repay.”

“Think not, my son,” replied the recluse, “that I have chosen this retirement with the view of separating myself from the labors to which my life has been devoted, or from want of sympathy with my fellow disciples. No—it is here that I may best afford advice to the feeble-minded and the persecuted. It is here that I am enabled to be about

my Master's business, in a way best suited to my remaining strength. This cell has been the gathering-place of the disciples—these walls have heard the voice of their united prayers, and echoed to their songs of praise. Here the holy Paul has preached the Gospel of salvation—”

“And here,” interrupted the tribune, almost involuntarily, “Julia Metella first listened to the words of the Christian doctrine?”

“You say truly,” replied the recluse, “and it was here that I was permitted to prepare her for the holy rite of baptism. Soldier, I have been told that the maiden is dear to your heart.”

“She is my betrothed,” replied Flavius with increased interest in his tone.

His companion mused for a moment in silence, and then, drawing a roll of parchment from his bosom, answered,

“The way before you lies through trial and suffering—and the hour may come when there shall be no marrying or giving in marriage. My heart yearns over thee, my son, as over one whom God has led by a way thou as yet knowest not—to the threshold of his kingdom. In this scroll thou wilt find the record of all that Jesus did and taught while he sojourned among men. Study it with prayer—and may the Eternal Spirit enlighten thy mind, and strengthen thy heart. And now—be silent and observe.”

Through the irregular mouth of the grotto they were enabled to command a view of the space above, now strongly illuminated by the clear moonlight, while their own position was comparatively safe from observation. The regular and measured step of a numerous company, convinced the tribune

that it was indeed one of the Prætorian bands which approached them. Ere long the advanced section came into view, and he laid his hand upon his sword as he discerned the person of Tigellinus himself between the chief centurions of the Imperial body guard. Controlling his emotion, he watched with breathless anxiety the passage of the band across the field of view, and his worst apprehensions were realized, as he beheld, in the midst of the silent soldiery, a closely covered litter, borne by four Nubian slaves, and carefully guarded by the crossed arms of the troop. His first impulse was to rush from his concealment and attempt the rescue of the prisoners—but the hand of his companion, with a grasp almost beyond the power of age, was already on his arm.

“Do not this rashness,” he whispered in his ear, “for thou wilt spend thy strength in vain. The time is come when thou must present thyself before Nero. Tarry till these men of blood have passed with their victims, and then speed thee through the grotto to the stables of Lucan.”

Flavius released his arm with some effort, from the grasp of the aged man, and gazed upon his white and passionless features in astonishment.

“Listen, then,” replied the other calmly, “and thou wilt hear the orders of the prefect. The prisoners are destined to the prisons of the amphitheatre.”

As Flavius again raised his eyes to the mouth of the grotto, he became painfully conscious of the madness of any attempt at rescue. A far more numerous and well appointed band than the nature of the service seemed to require, followed after the

litter. And as he looked, he heard the directions of Tigellinus.

“Convey the prisoners to the strong chambers of the amphitheatre—and thou, Volusius Proculus, see that thou guard them well and in all respect, until farther orders under the Emperor’s signet.”

“Thank God, my father,” was heard in a tone which thrilled to the heart of the tribune, while it cooled the fever of his apprehension—“thank God, we are not yet to be separated.”

A strong party under the command of Proculus, separated itself in obedience to this command from the main body of the troops, and, with the litter in their midst, turned towards the ascent where stood the magnificent amphitheatre of Puteoli.

“Farewell, noble Piso—farewell friends,” was heard in the calm, firm voice of Metellius, “we shall meet again when Rome shall know her own.”

“Forward,” shouted the prefect, in loud and impatient accents. “And thou, Sylla, wilt return with these to the traitorous den wherein their foul plots were hatched. Nero will indeed sup with Piso on the morrow, but the feast will be an indifferent one to some. Forward, and remember that the Emperor visits Baïæ ere another sun shall set.”

“Thou hast heard, my son,” said the recluse to Flavius, as the footsteps of the retreating parties died away, “God has guided thee hither, that thou mightest know their devices. Farewell—thou canst reach Rome ere the barge of the courtier shall approach the shores of the Tiber. Attempt no violence, but seek the Emperor at once, and be bold in thy speech, for the time requires it.”

"If the ear of justice is shut, this hand will know its work," replied the tribune, with deep emotion.

"Forbear," answered the recluse solemnly, and raising his finger towards heaven. "In the name of God, I command thee to use no violence. And remember that the Christian maiden will shrink from the presence of him on whom rests the curse of blood."

Flavius ventured no reply, but rushed from the grotto and rapidly took his way towards the villa of Lucan. Leaving him to pursue his doubtful mission, with the results of which only it is necessary that the reader should be acquainted, we pass on to the remaining incidents of our history.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOLDEN HOUSE OF NERO.

It is worth
A sacrifice.—Come friend ! Be noble-minded !
Our own heart, not other men's opinions
Forms our true honor.

WALLENSTEIN.

THE autumnal sun was again descending from his meridian, when the gorgeous train of the Emperor, glittering with polished steel and gold, swept through the grotto of Pausilippo, and ascended the gentle acclivity towards his favorite country seat. This was the place appointed for the trial of those engaged in the conspiracy, the leading particulars of which, as we have seen, were discovered on the preceding day.

The Golden House of Nero, so called from the resemblance it bore to the magnificent structure of the same name within the bounds of the capital, was situated near the temple of Jupiter Serapis, the site of which is to this day designated by its imperishable remains of Egyptian architecture. The gilded front of the portico rose directly over the broad highway of Puteoli, and the elevated tower in the rear commanded a view

of the varied scenery in the vicinity, and overlooked the amphitheatre beyond.

The preparations within the spacious walls of the villa denoted an occasion of unusual interest. The central hall was lined with soldiers of the Imperial body guard, while a body of men in the senatorial garb occupied a platform at its eastern extremity. Within the open space below, a company of Nubian slaves stood erect and motionless as so many statues, each with his eyes bent upon the heavy curtains of purple and gold, which separated the hall from the private apartments of the Emperor.

Ere long, a movement among the guards announced his approach. The curtains were drawn aside by the obedient slaves, and Nero entered, accompanied by Tigellinus, Seneca, and others, and took his seat upon the throne in the midst of the senators. His countenance was flushed with excitement—his eye had lost its mild expression, and flashed with unwonted fire. Yet his step was uncertain, and his hand trembled upon his staff.

“It is well, my lords,” he said, looking around him with a quick and somewhat suspicious glance, “let the prisoners be arraigned—Scevinus and Antonius Natalis have been confronted with Mili-chus, and examined apart. Let Natalis be summoned again to our presence, and ye shall judge, illustrious senators,” he added, turning again to the tribunal, “whether our fears have been groundless!”

The sound of iron was heard upon the marble floor of the opposite entrance, and in another moment, the prisoner, cruelly fettered and guarded by six or eight soldiers, was conducted into the centre of the hall.

"There is yet time for confession," said Nero with an angry brow, and speaking in confused and hurried accents, "there is yet time for confession, vile man, but the hour of clemency will quickly pass."

A deadly paleness had overspread the countenance of Natalis, but his voice was firm as he replied,

"I have nothing to confess, august Cæsar. I have nothing to urge against the base falsehoods of a slave, except the integrity of my life, and my honorable career as a citizen of Rome."

"Away with him, then, to the rack," exclaimed Nero, his features crimsoned with rage. "But stay," he added, springing to his feet, "let the rack be brought hither—we will ourselves put him to the question."

A faint murmur of disapprobation ran through the group of senators at this proposal. Nero understood its meaning, and his features relaxed in a malicious smile.

"Let us not shrink, my lords, from this necessary trial of our mercy. Perchance fear will do that which clemency cannot effect."

"The dignity of this assembly, my prince," replied Seneca, with a calm look towards the group, "will not be tarnished by the necessary severities of justice."

"Hear me, Cæsar," exclaimed Natalis wildly, as the terrible instruments of torture were laid by the slaves at the foot of the throne. "Let the grave Seneca be the first to endure the torture, for he has more to confess than many who are already in bonds."

The philosopher started at this unexpected de-

claration, but the undisturbed repose of his features proved how thoroughly he was enabled to control his emotions. "Et tu Brute!" said Nero, darting a look of dark suspicion at his preceptor, which the latter met firmly without reply, except by a smile of serene indifference.

"I accuse Caius Piso, and Seneca," said Natalis, now thoroughly overcome by his fears, "I accuse Julius Metellus, Lucan, and Flavius, the tribune. Let them be confronted with me before the rack, and I will prove their guilt."

"These are already accused," replied Nero, glancing meaningly at Tigellinus, "Wilt thou also charge Fenius Rufus and Scevinus?"

"I do," replied the trembling senator.

"It is enough," said Nero, "away with him, and let Metellus be brought."

But Seneca advanced and stood before him with an air in which violated confidence and offended pride struggled together for expression. He cast himself upon his knees at Nero's feet, and was about to speak, when the latter interrupted him.

"Arise Seneca," he said, "I fear not such as thou, were there a thousand conspiracies lying together in that scheming brain. Per hercle! man, is it not thy trade?"

"Alas, my prince," replied the philosopher, "you do me wrong. I would wipe away this foul blot of suspicion."

"That thou shalt do," answered Nero with singular levity of manner, "when we are in counsel together. Is it not proof enough that I do not credit this man, that thou art free? What wouldst thou more? And now, Tigellinus, to our work."

The prefect advanced, and bowing reverently to the tribunal, exclaimed in a loud voice—

“I accuse Varus Dobella and Julius Metellus, with the foul crimes of conspiracy and atheism—of an attempt against the sacred life of the Emperor, such as we have heard—and of connection with the Christian dogs in the destruction of Rome! My own testimony to this accusation has been laid before the Emperor.”

“The prefect says truly,” replied Nero, “let them be brought hither.”

At a significant gesture from Tigellinus, Volusius Proculus darted from the hall. The silence of expectation which ensued, was soon broken by the arrival of the accused, but the expression of surprise which burst from the lips of the Emperor announced something of unexpected interest in their appearance. All eyes were riveted upon the advancing group—and the cheek of Tigellinus grew crimson with anger, as he discerned the form of Julia Metella, leaning upon the arm of her father, and the tall figure and noble countenance of the tribune following close behind them. The faithful Salome attended her mistress, and both were closely veiled.

“Whom have we here?” asked the Emperor of the courtier, with unfeigned astonishment, which was in no wise relieved by the sight of the troubled countenance of the latter. “I behold Dobella, and Metellus, but the tribune comes unbidden—and the females—”

“I come, Cæsar,” exclaimed Flavius, before the courtier could reply, “to protect the innocent and to bring the guilty to justice. I come to vindicate Varus Dobella from the vile charge which is brought

against him, and to proclaim the honor of Julius Metellus."

The Emperor cast a hasty look around the guards, and threw himself farther back upon his seat.

"Thou art thyself," he said, "among the accused!"

"For myself," answered the tribune, "the vindication will come in its own time. I have sought thee in vain, O Cæsar! since midnight. That noble soldier," pointing to Dobella, "is accused of connection with the Christians in promoting the late burning of the city. By the honor of a soldier, he and they are innocent of the foul charge. Julius Metellus is accused of the same crime—he will answer for himself, and there are those present who will support his assertions."

Nero glanced again at Tigellinus, who advanced and replied:

"On the awful night of the conflagration, Varus Dobella led on the Christians, banding them together, as hundreds of the German soldiery have already attested, in the secret chambers of the tombs—and there resisting the authority of the laws. I myself was sorely wounded by the sword of a Christian. On that night many of the Christians were seen exulting over the progress of the flames, of whom, Selumiel, one well known to us all by his fierce and blinded zeal, perished in the very act."

"Hast thou aught to answer against this charge, Varus Dobella?" said Nero, not without some show of agitation—"if so, speak, for the ears of justice are open."

"There is one," replied Dobella, "whom He

that rules the affairs of men has brought here to speak for me. If it be a crime to be a Christian, then am I guilty, indeed—but of the burning of the city, I am innocent.”

A fierce murmur rolled through the assembly at the bold avowal of Dobella, and the countenance of Nero was lit up with a smile of gratification as he heard it. But when Metellus advanced to the throne, the murmur subsided—

“Were Caius Piso here,” he began, “he could testify with me as to the justice of this charge against the Christians. Let the senators of Rome be the judges of my integrity, when I say, that I myself saw the slaves of the imperial household engaged in that base work.”

“Beware,” cried a warning voice from the crowd, in which Flavius imagined that he recognized the tones of Sulpicius Asper. But Metellus proceeded regardless of the interruption—

“For one,” he said, “I deny not the crime, if crime it be, of conspiracy against thy life, degenerate Cæsar! That crime were *now* a virtue in every true-hearted citizen of Rome.”

The tumult produced by this unshrinking confession was hushed almost as soon as it began, by the earnest and thrilling accents of a woman’s voice. Nero started to his feet, as Julia Metella cast herself upon her knees before the throne, and unveiled her features. The surpassing loveliness of the maiden was not lost even upon him. He advanced to raise her from her position—but she shrank from his extended hand, while the large brilliant tears coursed down her flushed cheek, and her lips quivered with emotion.

“Spare him,” she cried, “dread Cæsar! and

urge him not to speak those desperate words. Let my own worthless life be offered up in exchange for his. Spare him, as you hope for mercy in heaven."

Hard hearted and selfish as he was, the Emperor could not altogether resist an appeal like this, from the lips of such a petitioner. His brow lost something of its angry expression, and he looked doubtfully at Tigellinus. The latter stood as one enchained by a spell—admiration and surprise having wholly overcome, for the time, the more malignant passions of his heart.

"Thy life, maiden," at length he said—

"And mine," exclaimed Flavius, as, hurried forward by the torrent of his feelings, he flung himself at the side of his beloved—"let us die together, but save the life of Metellus."

At this new interruption, Tigellinus started forward as if stung by a serpent. He flung himself upon the kneeling form of the tribune and snatched a dagger from his robe which he held aloft before the eyes of the assembly.

"This is he, my prince," he exclaimed, "once chosen to be the first to send the dagger to thy heart. This is he who has even now sought thy presence with this sacrilegious intent."

He had calculated well upon the fears of the tyrant. The transient emotions of admiration and pity excited by the generous but fruitless self-devotion of the maiden, vanished before the apprehension of his own danger.

"The daughter of Metellus," continued Tigellinus, pursuing the advantage which he saw he had gained, "lies under accusation as a Christian."

"Let her be brought to the trial with the rest

on the morrow—for this malignant superstition must be crushed wherever its seeds have been cast. And thou, traitorous tribune! what punishment is due to the soldier who basely violates his oath of allegiance to his prince?"

"Cæsar, I come but now from the death-bed of Lucan, whom the sword of treachery has already reached. He died as a hero (•)—let *me* die as a Christian!"

"Away with him, then, to the prisons of the amphitheatre," replied the prince, "and let him die there in such companionship as he craves. Hear ye this, O Romans; the atheism of these miscreants has robbed Rome of one of the most beautiful of her daughters, and contaminated the hearts of her best soldiery."

"Hear me yet one word," said Flavius, as he stood erect with the grasp of the slave upon his arm. "There was a time, Cæsar, when no soldier in your army was more devoted to your service; and that was as long as you deserved the esteem of mankind. I began to hate you when you was guilty of parricide; when you murdered your mother and destroyed your wife; when you became a coachman, a comedian, an incendiary."

As he heard this, the form of the Emperor literally shook with rage. He grasped convulsively the offered arm of Seneca, and gestured to Tigellius to order the prisoners from the hall.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRISON CHAMBER.

Yea, she doth smile and she doth weep,
Like a youthful hermitess,
Beauteous in a wilderness,
Who praying always, prays in sleep.

* * * * *

But this she knows, in joys and woes,
That heaven will aid if men will call,
For the blue heaven bends over all.

CHRISTABEL.

From the narrow, grated windows of her prison chamber, Julia Metella sat watching the changes of the varied and beautiful landscape below, until the twilight faded away, and the stars came out upon the sky. For more than one weary hour her eye had dwelt upon the spot where the home of her youth lay embowered amidst the groves of Baiæ. She saw the pleasant portico by the water side, and the barges sleeping upon the wave; she almost fancied that she could discern the shifting of the foliage, and the autumnal flowers in the courtyard bowing their heads to the departing light; she almost fancied that she heard the murmurs of the fountains in the garden walks. With melancholy interest she watched the flight of the birds

toward their nests in the quiet woods, for each seemed to her as a familiar form, a thing which she had loved, and with which she had held companionship in her happiest hours. How often, on such an evening, had she found her highest enjoyment in those sacred domestic rites which now were to be renewed no more around that shrine of peace and of love. How often had she there watched for her father's approving smile, which, from her earliest years, had been the sunshine of her spirit. In that beautiful and secluded retreat she had opened her ear to the first whisperings of love—there had love's roseate morning been passed—there had the first cloud obscured its horizon. She thought of the gatherings around the domestic altar—of the delightful converse—of the enthusiasm inspired by the lay of the poet and the page of the orator—of the long brilliant hours devoted to the enjoyments of friendship, or the willing offices of filial love. That dear spot was peopled, for the moment, in fancy's eye, with its accustomed forms, and seemed radiant once more with the light of the "old familiar faces." The spell was lifted from the past, and the voices of its old music floated again to her ear.

Who can wonder that amidst such thoughts and recollections, the hour was one of deep melancholy, softened, and only softened, by emotions, which at any other time, it would have been unmingled joy to feel. But amidst all the gloom and danger, the pressure of present affliction, and the certainty of severer trial in the future, no regret for the avowal she had made of the Christian profession, came over her heart. This, indeed, was her support and solace—and her soul thrilled with joy when she dwelt

upon the hope of meeting her beloved friends again on the peaceful shores of that heavenly country, which faith shows most distinctly amidst the thickest darkness that broods over all the roaring waters of time. In leading the heart of her father and her lover, "by ways which they knew not," to the knowledge, to the experience of the power of the truth—what a motive for gratitude and praise to God! How holy seemed now the tie which bound her to both—how exquisitely dear the tender affection of the one, and the earnest devoted love of the other.

Motionless as the stone which rose above them, Salome sat at her feet, with her eyes bent upon the same enchanting scene. Her features were paler than before, but there was in all, even in the large brilliant eye, the same calm, subdued expression which they had worn in happier moments. Now and then she lifted her eyes to the countenance of her mistress, and then her glance returned to the scene without.

At length the broad red orb of the moon arose above the distant horizon, beyond the spot where the outline of the mountains blended with the plain. The front of the temple of Jupiter Serapis, (10) immediately in front of her prison, was lit up by the gloomy splendor, and the stone towers beyond, reflected it yet more gloomily. As she looked upon it, the sense of her lonely and deserted situation came upon her mind with a power which she could not resist. There was, at such a moment, something ominous in its bloody and threatening aspect. It brought afresh the appalling images of persecution—of the sore trial—of the ignominious death. She turned from the window,

and as the faint light faded from her features, rendered more touchingly beautiful by the impress of sorrow, a few large, glittering tears rolled down her cheek, and the deep, long-drawn sigh of exhausted and suffering nature, escaped her lips. She scarcely heeded the presence of her companion, and by that quick sympathy which always exists between hearts which understand each other, the latter quietly rose and took her seat in the corner of the prison. She had judged rightly. Julia had desired to be alone with her own heart and with her God.

To whom, indeed, could she go, but to Him who protects the afflicted, and treasures up the tears of all His servants? In whose ears could she breathe the overwhelming burden of sorrow that lay upon her heart, but in the ears of Him who has promised to hear the cry of all who love him. In the deep affliction—the gloom—the almost despair of that hour, there was one ray of blessed, glorious hope undimmed, and it guided her soul through the thick darkness, to the throne of Him

“Who ceaseth not,
To watch his saints away.”

She fell upon her knees and lifted up her streaming eyes to heaven—and her spirit was bowed in the holiness of prayer.

“Lamb of God,” such were the broken accents of her supplication, “Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, save me, oh save me, from despair! Blessed Redeemer, accept my contrition, and bow my stubborn heart entirely to thy gracious will. If I have erred in the purpose of saving my father from the hands of his enemies, thou Lord, who readest the heart, pardon what thou hast

seen amiss in it, and as thou hast ordered otherwise, give me the grace to discern the wisdom of thine appointment. Strengthen, prepare me for what yet awaits me, and as thou canst cause thy name to be glorified in the weakest, grant that I may be faithful unto the end."

She bent her head, and for a few moments was silent. The moonlight was now streaming through the grated window, and it fell upon her loosened tresses and delicate form, like the very light of heaven, as if enshrining her in its embrace. As she continued to kneel, the sorrow at her heart gave place to Christian gratitude, and the accents of supplication were changed to the voice of thanksgiving.

"I thank thee, O my Saviour, for the love which has brought my father and my betrothed to the knowledge of thy truth. I thank thee for the confidence that thou wilt give them strength in the evil day, and power to withstand all the arts of the tempters. Build them up, O Christ, in thy most holy faith. Pour into their hearts the abundance of thy spirit, and give them strength and consolation, according to their need."

She arose from her knees, and her eye was calm in its surpassing beauty, and her smile was as peaceful and radiant as the smile of an angel of heaven. She heard the sobs of Salome, and advanced to her side, taking the hand of the latter in her own.

"A few more hours, Salome!" she said, "and all our tears will be dried. A few more hours, and we shall all be happy in heaven. Weep not, my sister, for a sister you have, indeed, been to me; weep not."

"O, my mistress," replied the Judæan, "these

are tears of joy ; my heart is full, and it seeks relief in tears. For us, it is now 'gain' to die.' And yet," she added, suddenly, "it was fearful to witness what I saw but now. Epicharis is no more."

"How died she?" asked Julia, and as she noted the sorrowful expression that came over the features of her companion, she repeated the question, "How died she, Salome?"

"As she lived," replied the other in choked accents, "as she lived. Her strange delusion held to the last. She gloried in her crime, but would neither confess aught as to her accomplices, nor express aught of remorse. They put her to the torture. Every limb writhed with pain, but she smiled proudly upon her tormentors, and expired with the secret unrevealed."

"There is mercy with heaven," replied Julia, shuddering at the brief but graphic recital, "were any of the brethren with her in her last moments?"

"None—none," answered the Judæan, "Flavius stood by, awaiting his own summons to the torture—but oh! my mistress—"

A deadly paleness overspread the countenance of Julia as she heard the reply of her attendant. She reeled for a moment, uncertainly, and then fell in her outstretched arms.

"They dared not," she faintly said, brokenly and at intervals, "Oh God, they dared not."

"You say well, my mistress," replied Salome in quick and eager accents—"they did not put him to the rack."

A long, heavy sigh testified that the assurance had not fallen in vain upon the ear of the Roman maiden. Yet she lay for another moment insensi-

ble, and then opening her eyes languidly, a sickly smile broke over her features.

“What saidst thou of Flavius?” she said with effort, “speak, for I can hear it—but oh no—not the torture—said’st thou the torture?”

“I did not,” replied Salome, gently soothing the fears of the sufferer, more by her looks than her words.

“Thank heaven,” fervently exclaimed Julia, “speak on then, Salome, for I am strong now.”

“The dying woman,” continued the other, “smiled with strange meaning upon the tribune, as a change in her position gave some respite to her pains, and spake these words, pointing upwards with the unfettered arm—‘Christian soldier, we shall meet in heaven, and there is One to judge us there.’”

“Alas!” murmured the maiden, “she had much to be pardoned, and she suffered much. Said she nought else?”

“She left a message for thee, my mistress, but I fear to speak it at this hour.”

“Mistrust me not,” replied the maiden anxiously, “for the weakness of my woman’s heart; speak on, Salome.”

“She spake of thine espousals and of the white robe in which the Lamb shall claim thee for his own. A ray of her old beauty gleamed over her wasted features, as she added, looking on the tribune, “Ye shall be united, but not on earth—and the saints in bliss are like the angels in heaven.”

A flood of brilliant tears poured down the cheek of the Roman virgin as she listened to these words, on which a faint blush was visible, so innocently pure, so beautiful, that it seemed, indeed, born of

heaven. She replied not, but pressed the hand of Salome in silent gratitude.

Sweet was the converse they held together during the brief half hour yet allowed to the stay of the attendant, and the last precious moments of that time were again devoted to prayer.

"I will visit thee again at midnight, beloved mistress," whispered Salome, in the ear of the other, as she prepared to obey the summons of the guard, "for I have that which can win its way even through walls of stone."

Julia continued kneeling on the same spot where her attendant had left her, and the time passed silently and unheeded away. How blest, if thus it had worn on to the midnight hour!

The grating of the prison door on its hinges of iron, ere long aroused her from her meditation. She stood upon her feet, and hastily veiled her features, as she observed a tall form, completely enveloped in a military cloak, advancing from the threshold. A sudden misgiving came over her heart, but it was momentary. Then she stood firmly upon the stone awaiting the movements of her visiter.

"I come to save thee, maiden," said the intruder, in a voice which sent a thrill through her frame, "to cast myself and my honors at your feet. Behold your suppliant." As he said this, the cloak dropped from his features, and revealed the noble but excited features of Tigellinus.

"Behold your suppliant," he cried, dropping on his knee. "Beautiful tyrant, you have made me your slave, and I come that you may forge the chain the closer, by the severing of your own."

"Forbear this mockery, my lord," replied the maiden, in a low but firm voice: "if you come to

insult my misery, it is but a poor office for a noble and a soldier."

"Let me but look upon those features," added the courtier, while a crimson flush belied the careless smile upon his lip, "and I will speak my errand. Julia Metella, I bring thee liberty."

Julia retreated a step from him, as she replied in the same firm, but gentle accents,—

"I seek not my liberty, my lord, on the terms which you will offer."

"Yet deign one moment," he added, rising, "most lovely goddess, to smile upon me while thou hearest them. It may be that they are not altogether unworthy of the daughter of a consul."

"Approach no nearer," she replied, as he manifested a design of advancing, "but speak and I will hear."

"Here," he said, producing a scroll from the folds of his tunic, and displaying the imperial signature attached to it; "here is the warrant for thy father's pardon—thy father's safety and thine own—if—if—"

A convulsive sigh testified the struggle that had already commenced in her bosom, and arrested his words for a moment. He resumed—

"If thou wilt be mine."

"And the alternative?" she asked, flinging the veil from her brow, and meeting the bold gaze of her persecutor with a bright, firm eye.

"Speak not of the alternative, thou fairer than Venus," he cried; "be mine, and here are safety, riches, honor—the noblest palaces of Rome—the luxuries of every clime."

"Forbear," she said, interrupting him. "Thine I can never be, for my heart is vowed to another."

"He dies," responded Tigellinus passionately, as

an angry frown darkened his brow. "He dies with to-morrow's sun. He dies the death of a traitor."

The lip of the maiden quivered slightly, but her voice was unbroken, as she replied :

"Heaven, my lord, will care for its own. If these are the terms you offer, I have but one reply, and that reply you have already heard."

"Provoke me not, maiden," he exclaimed, as the fire kindled in his eye, and he laid his hand upon his dagger in sudden passion. Then, as if ashamed of the unmanly threat, he added, "But who can feel resentment under the light of those radiant eyes!"

"My lord," replied the other, again retreating before him, "my resolution is taken; thou knowest I am a Christian—as a Christian I can die."

"A Christian!" repeated Tigellinus, as a bitter sneer curled his lip,—“Aye, I forgot, and as a Christian thou art already doomed. Speak but the word, beautiful Julia, and I will snatch thee from destruction: I—I will even myself call myself a Christian.”

"Thou!" repeated she, recoiling, and a gleam of beautiful disdain flashed for an instant across her brow. The next moment a tear was on her cheek, her eyes were upraised, and a half-uttered petition broke from her parted lips.

"Thou *shalt* be mine," exclaimed Tigellinus, casting off all restraint, and seizing her veil, which he essayed to tear from her head. Surprised by the suddenness of the moment, she trembled for an instant, and her form seemed sinking to the ground; but the moment of weakness and fear passed as rapidly as it came. She freed herself from his rude grasp, and as she did so, her eye fell upon the exposed hilt of his dagger. The spirit of her father's

house inspired her, as she snatched the weapon from its resting place, and held it before the breast of her persecutor. He fell back, amazed, before the glittering steel, and then his astonishment gave way to an affected laugh of scorn.

"Nay, maiden," he said, "weapons of steel were not made for such delicate fingers."

"Stand back, miserable man!" she replied, and there was unflinching determination in her eye; "the Christian can die, indeed, but the Roman maiden can defend her honor!"

"Nay, then, thy Gods protect thee," exclaimed Tigellinus, stung to madness by her firmness, "If I must use violence."

"Ho there, the guard without!" suddenly cried out the maiden; as the thought of the stern discipline of the Roman prisons inspired a new hope, "protect the prisoners of the state."

The door burst open, and the forms of the guards darkened the door.

"Fool!" exclaimed the courtier, hastily concealing his features; "thou hast cut off thine only hope of safety. Thou hast sacrificed thy sire, but thou canst not save thyself. I will snatch thee even from the arena; and yet I will delay my decision. When thou comest into the amphitheatre, lift but thy hand in token that thou wilt yet submit."

"Away!" replied the maiden, veiling her eyes with her now trembling hands, as the dagger dropped at the feet of her persecutor, "away!"

The courtier turned away with a look, in which admiration and malignity were strangely blended. Scarcely deigning to notice the faithful and resolute guards, he strode from the apartment, and Julia of Baiæ was again alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIDNIGHT HOUR.

——“Dost thou then know thy destiny?—that robe”—
“It is my nuptial robe,” exclaimed the virgin; but if all is
finished—if my spouse is pardoned and I am free—why these
tears and this mystery?”

CHATEAUBRIAND.

THE midnight hour was brilliant and serene, and the soft full light of the moon, now declining from the meridian, lay upon the floor of the prison, as brightly and peacefully as if it slept on the mosaic of a palace. The fair inmate of that prison, over-wearied by suffering and excitement, had committed herself to the hard couch, to snatch a few moments of fevered sleep. The tunic closely wrapped around her form, and the veil only half put off from her features, testified that she had not anticipated undisturbed repose. At the side of the couch, with her eyes bent upon the placid and sweet countenance of the sleeper, sat the unwearied Salome, the uncalled attendant of her rest.

“Sleep on, beloved mistress,” she murmured at intervals, in the soft music of her native tongue; “sleep on, sweet flower, for the dews that water thy slumber—thy last slumber beneath the stars—will soon cause thee to awake in the bloom and

beauty of Paradise. Sleep on, for the hours of thine earthly rest are numbered ; but there remaineth a rest for the people of God, where earthly cares interrupt not the calm of the soul. But hark, they come !”

She arose silently from her place, and advanced with light, inaudible footsteps to the door. The bolts were withdrawn, and the iron helmet of a soldier appeared in the aperture, but the features beneath it were obscured by a silken visor. As if doubtful of his own movements, he paused for a moment upon the threshold where he stood, and his eye rapidly scanned the situation of things within. Then, as if reassured by the brief inspection, he advanced, and uncovered his face. The countenance was unknown to the Judæan, but the honest and animated look inspired confidence, especially as he wore the garb and appointments of one in authority among the guards.

“ He waits without,” he said ; in a voice low indeed, but perfectly audible to Salome.

“ Julius Metellus ?” inquired the Judæan, in the same cautious tone.

“ The same. The tribune and the Christian will follow under the guidance of another.”

“ And the guards of the prison ?” again inquired Salome, as she cast a suspicious glance towards the door.

“ Have consented to their admission, when the credit of Sulpicius Asper is pledged,” replied the centurion—for such he was—with a meaning smile.

“ Thanks, noble soldier, thanks,” replied the Judæan, fervently, for the name was not unfamiliar to her ear. “ I fear thou hast endangered thine own safety ?”

"I would risk my *life* for *him*," replied the centurion; "and my only regret is, that my influence extends not to the guards of Dobella."

"Bringest thou any tidings of him?" asked the Judæan anxiously.

"None, except that he bears his confinement as a man and a soldier, and looks upon the near approach of death with an untroubled eye. "Shall I admit Metellus," he added, glancing towards the couch on which Julia yet lay in slumber.

"Admit him, generous Asper," replied Salome, as she advanced to the couch; "I will prepare her for the interview."

Asper retired and returned quickly with Metellus. The paleness upon the cheek of the latter testified to the severity of his confinement, but the old, grave smile sat upon his lip—such a smile as he had been wont to wear when the pressure of care was removed by the cheerfulness and affectionate attentions of his daughter.

"Thanks, Sulpicius Asper!" he said, as he turned towards the retreating centurion; "you have acted nobly towards us all."

"Nay, no thanks, my lord," the soldier replied, "for I deserve them not. It was my hand which first brought the accusation upon Flavius, who is innocent of the death of that wretch Syphax. Tomorrow I will proclaim myself as the assassin, in the ears of all men."

And thou also art accused as an adherent of Piso," replied Metellus, with a proud smile.

"Not yet, not yet;" replied the soldier, "else were my authority this night less than you know it to be. But that also shall be known."

"Do nothing rashly, soldier," answered the patrician: "lives like thine are doubly precious now to Rome."

"My lord," rejoined Asper, solemnly, as he waved a courteous farewell, "I am prepared to die with my friends."

"Shall I awake her, my lord?" asked Salome, as they stood together beside the couch of the sleeper.

"Not yet Salome," he answered; "let her sleep on, while yet she may."

The Judæan retired to a distant part of the chamber, and, kindling the lamp suspended from the ceiling, sat down, and veiled her features.

"My daughter!" murmured Metellus (and then he paused, for his heart was full,) and he brushed away a tear that rolled, unbidden, down his manly cheek—

"My daughter—beautiful and innocent, and blessed as thou art, even in thy dreams—how beautiful and how dear dost thou seem to me now! Can it be—" he added, and the remaining words were lost, as he bent down and impressed a fervent kiss upon her lips: "may Christ, in whom thou dost trust, protect thee, when my own eyes are closed in death."

"Christ," faintly echoed the beautiful sleeper, as the holy name mingled with her dream, "Christ—he is mine—he is mine. Even so, my Saviour; I hear thy call—I come—I come."

Her father took her hand, and pressed it fervently to his bosom. She opened her eyes, and, dazzled by the light, closed them again.

"I see, I see," she murmured, "the golden street—the light of the Jerusalem which is above."

"Awake, my daughter, it is thy father who calls thee," cried the patrician, raising the slight form to his breast.

"My father," replied the maiden, wildly gazing at him for a moment, and then, as a sense of her true situation flashed upon her mind, she leaned her head upon his neck, and burst into tears. "Oh, my father, this is too much happiness!"

They sat down together upon the couch, and their conversation was long and earnest. It was interrupted by the arrival of those friends, who, by the kind attention of Asper, had been promised admission to the chamber. These were Subrius Flavius and the recluse of Pausilippo.

Why should we dwell upon this meeting of the lovers: the last, as they both believed, which should be allowed them on this side the grave?

Ere the hour allotted to them had worn away, the patrician advanced, and took the hands of each. Salome, as she knelt in her retired place, spake aloud.

"They have been lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in death they shall not be divided."

"It is true, my children," said Metellus, in answer to the inquiring glance of both. "We know not what danger—what fate worse than death—heaven may yet have in store for us. But it is right to guard against the craft and cruelty of wicked men. Approach, venerable Christian, and unite these, my children, by the most sacred of bonds."

"Father!" exclaimed Julia, with emotion, as the recluse approached, and then bowed her head, for she could not utter the question which sprang to her lips.

"Fear not, my daughter," he said; "these hands have poured the waters of baptism upon the brow of all thou lovest."

"I am indeed a Christian," said Metellus, kissing the pale brow of his daughter, and resuming her hand; "and now, Julia, if thou canst bear it, this holy man will do his office."

A smile illuminated the features of the maiden, as she felt the pressure of the hand of her betrothed. She arose, and stood at his side.

"Thine—thine only," exclaimed the soldier, "in life—in death."

"In death, indeed, my children," responded Metellus; "but God's will be done."

The simple and beautiful ceremony was soon completed: and when the prayers were over, while the soldier and his bride yet knelt together at the feet of the recluse, the weeping Salome advanced with noiseless footstep, and placed a single white rose in the hair of her mistress.

CHAPTER IX.

THE AMPHITHEATRE OF PUTEOLI.

"Now I am ready : earthly friends are gone :
Angels and blessed spirits, to your fellowship
A few short pangs will bring me.—
O thou, who on the cross for sinful men
A willing sufferer hung'st, receive my soul !"

JOANNA BAILLIE.

"Hast thou heard the news ?" said one citizen to another, as they toiled together up the ascent which led to the amphitheatre of Puteoli.

"Seneca is dead," replied the other. I have heard it all. He died nobly, it is true, poor fellow ! Such is the fate of all those who serve the Emperor !"

"Hush !" replied the other, looking suspiciously around, "of those who serve themselves, you would say. To my mind, this luxurious philosopher deserved his death. The warm bath and the blood-letting were too good for him."

"And yet he died with dignity."

"Dignity !" replied the other, with a sneer ; "dignity in an old man who has exhausted life. So have I seen the Christian dogs go to the shades with a dignity which would be beautiful indeed, had not our eyes seen it so often."

“Thou art an ungracious scoffer,” said the other, “and thou hast heard, also, I warrant me, of the death of our famous poet, Lucan.”

“Yes, and of his cowardice, in giving up the name of his mother as an accomplice in the conspiracy,” replied the universal cynic; “and yet he died with his own words in his mouth—

*Nec sicut vulnere sanguis
Emicuit lentus. Ruptis cedit undique venis
Pars ultima trunci
Tradidit in lethum vacuos, vitalibus artus,
At tunidos qua pulmo jacet, qua viscera fervent
Hæserunt ibi fata diu: Luctataque multum
Hæc cum parte, viri vix omnia membra tulerunt.*

It would be strange, indeed, if he who has described so many ways of dying, should not be able to die himself without setting men's tongues wagging.”

“But there will be noble game to-day, I hear. Dobella, and the daughter of Metellus, who, it is said, is a Christian.”

“A Christian! When dreamed'st thou that, sage Verus?” asked the other, in undisguised credulity.

“It is so, nevertheless,” replied Verus, “and she dies with her uncle. But see! they are already preparing for the sacrifice;” pointing, as they drew near to the sacerdotal group gathered beneath the gloomy portico of the temple of Jupiter Serapis.

“I care not for the sacrifice,” said his companion, pressing forward, “but I will on to secure a good seat in the amphitheatre. Per hercle, man! the shows come but once a year, and he is a fool who misses them for god or victim.”

The day was altogether favorable to the occasion, which was about to assemble the populace within

the walls of the amphitheatre; an edifice, second in extent and splendor only to that which, soon afterwards, under the munificent reign of Titus, arose to adorn the capitol. It was indeed a magnificent structure, as the brilliant light of the autumn day fell full upon its semi-circular front of marble, which presented the appearance of several successive porticos, beautifully ornamented, rising one upon another to the summit. It was sufficiently large to contain the vast multitude who were wont to throng its walls from all parts of the fertile and populous province of Campania, on the celebration of the public shows. Already the thronged roads, which led from the place in every direction, testified the eagerness with which the present opportunity of diversion was hailed; and the jostling crowds at the entrance of the several vomitories had already begun to contend for the right of entrance with the guards.

At one of these was a female in high expostulation with some one who opposed her entrance, and her voice at times changed to the accents of passionate entreaty.

"Let me enter, soldier," she said, "that I may look upon the preserver of my child, and upon the beautiful maiden who watched over it with all the care and tenderness of a mother."

"Back, woman," said the rough soldier, "and betake thee to the temple."

"I will not back," replied the woman; "nor will I lose this last moment of grateful remembrance of my benefactor."

"She says well," exclaimed one in the garb of an artisan: "there are many hearts that will bleed for Julius Metellus this day. When did the poor man

ever solicit his aid in vain? Shame on thee, barbarian, to refuse this simple desire of a grateful heart."

The guard flung himself back, and allowed the petitioner to enter. At that moment, the sounding of the trumpet announced the termination of the sacrificial rites, which was soon followed by another peculiar blast, announcing the approach of the imperial party. The multitude gave way on each hand, and the glittering and gorgeous throng poured through the gates into the interior.

The active efforts of the *designatores*, or masters of the ceremonies ensured order, by quickly distributing the various ranks to the places allotted to them, as they rushed through the spacious vomitories. From the elaborately ornamented railing which enclosed the *podium*, or most honorable place next the arena, to the highest range of seats occupied by the females, the whole interior was intensely crowded long before the party of the Emperor entered upon the scene, from the private chamber into which they had been conducted to snatch a few moments of repose after the din and excitement of the public procession. The podium alone was comparatively free from occupants. Instead of the august body of senators and foreign ambassadors, in the midst of which, on similar occasions in the capital, the Caesar was wont to appear, his sudden summons had brought together a few only of such of the senate as found it convenient to attend him, together with those patricians who still lingered at their villas. The magnificent shows which were to occupy the Circus Maximus on the following day, had already called to the metropolis all those of the nobles who were unconcerned in the con-

spiracy of Piso, or ignorant of its sudden discovery. Still, the imperial canopy, gorgeous with silk and gold, arose proudly in the centre of a brilliant and majestic group. The vestal virgins stood in their places on either wing of the canopy, clad in robes of white bordered with purple, and their brows adorned with the sacred fillets. In front of these, and directly opposite to the altar, which had been erected upon the arena, bearing the mysterious fire, and the images of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, were the three flamens of highest rank, whose presence seemed to indicate that the occasion of the day was, in part at least, a religious one. Behind the podium, and arranged by centuries around the entire circle of the amphitheatre, were the knights, a gay and glittering throng, to whom the day was sure to prove one of grateful excitement and revel. And yet an observant eye might have noticed at times within that circle, many anxious countenances, as if fear or passion were rather suppressed by strong effort than dispelled by the gaiety of the scene.

A buzz of expectation filled the vast assembly as the aedile, Publicola, advanced from the curule chair, to usher in the Emperor and his retinue. Habitual intoxication, or the unusual excitement of the day, had deepened the flush upon the countenance of Nero, and those of the populace who remembered his appearance in other days, looked in vain for the mild expression which his features once wore. The affected manner and effeminate attire were too plainly visible, but in the red, bloated aspect, and cold and careless glance, they recognised equally plainly, the hardened character of the tyrant. As he assumed the throne, the peal of trumpets arose

with the deafening shouts of the populace; and these were renewed with equal ardor as the haughty Poppæa, with a smile of queenly condescension, waved her hand to the crowded galleries, and assumed her seat by his side under the canopy. Then came Tigellinus, in the splendid dress which designated his rank as Prætorian Prefect, accompanied by ten centurions of the guard, with an equal number of subordinate officers following in the train of each. Next followed the several officers of the household, after whose entrance the doors of the podium were closed, and the dense ranks of the soldiery filled up the space between it and the railing of the arena. Among these, conspicuous by his noble form and open features, was Sulpicius Asper.

The amphitheatre was uncovered, for the day was so mild and balmy, that it was a luxury to breathe the delicious atmosphere. Although the sun had nearly gained his meridian, the spectators in the higher seats sought no protection from his rays, and the broad awnings waved idly upon the walls. Sweet perfumes, diffused from concealed tubes in the statues which stood upon every landing-place of the ascent to the different ranges of seats, inspired the sense of luxurious enjoyment: and the giddy populace, in the delights of the hour, forgot the iron hand which pressed them to the earth, and the danger to which the caprice of tyranny, various, but equally perilous, with every moment, exposed them.

The ædile rose again from his seat, and having caught the approving nod of the Emperor, proceeded to introduce the business of the day.

"We are assembled, O Romans," he said, "to

assign to merited infamy and death some of the leaders of that impious race who blaspheme the gods, and seek to overthrow the religion of the state. Varus Dobella, accused and convicted by his own confession of being a Christian, awaits the execution of his sentence in the chamber of the gladiators."

A low murmur of approbation ran through the assembly, and the ædile paused a moment till it subsided. He then resumed in a louder tone :

"But first," he said, "it becomes you to hear some of the details of that iniquitous conspiracy which has aimed a sacrilegious blow at the heart of our sacred Emperor."

He then narrated briefly the circumstances which had come to the knowledge of the court, with the names of the principal conspirators. When those of Caius Piso and Julius Metellus were announced, the profound silence and significant looks exchanged by the auditory, testified the interest inspired by the intelligence that those popular patricians were numbered with the proscribed. An uneasy movement in the circle of the Equestrian order was also visible as many officers of the Prætorian guards, with some of their own rank, absent from the amphitheatre were successively implicated by the unsparing voice of the ædile.

"Ye see the crime of these men, O Romans," continued Publicola, "and ye see the danger which the gods, mindful of the destinies of Rome have averted from the sacred head of Cæsar. Ye will approve, doubtless, of the sentence which consigns the traitors to infamy and death."

"Long live Nero, the greatest, august," was the shout which came from the populace, "and so perish all his enemies!"

There was no reply from the soldiery, and the knights joined feebly in the cry. The former continued to stand in their ranks with rigid indifference. One voice alone was raised, but as quickly lowered. It was the voice of Sulpicius Asper—his cheek was flushed with anger, and his eye shot fire. But the time had not yet come.

A cry of surprise was heard, as a centurion, in obedience to a sign from the Emperor, opened the iron gates which communicated with the ante-chamber of the spoliarium, or apartment allotted to the gladiators, and Metellus, Flavius, and Fenius Rufus, the colleague of Tigellinus in the præfecture, issued forth. They remained unbound, but were closely surrounded by a band of German soldiers. Behind these, similarly guarded, came Varus Dobella, arrayed for the approaching combat upon the arena. The gates closed again, and a few moments of profound silence succeeded, which was again broken by the voice of the ædile.

"The death of traitors is reserved for these," he cried, pointing to the three who occupied the centre of the first party—"they are brought forth, Romans! that you may look upon their shame."

A faint response was heard to this singular exercise of tyrannical authority, but the greater part, even of the rabble, averted their faces, while the soldiery cast their eyes sternly to the ground.

"Ye will not—ye dare not, slay him," suddenly screamed one from the seats of the females, "Julius Metellus is the preservor of my child. O spare him, benignant Nero!"

The Emperor moved uneasily upon his seat, for even so slight an interruption was not without its influence upon his fears.

"Who dares to speak thus?" cried the ædile angrily, glancing in the direction whence the voice proceeded.

The designatores rushed to the spot, but the individual had already effectually concealed herself in the crowd.

"Advance, Varus Dobella," exclaimed Nero, impatient of delay, while he motioned to the soldiers to conduct the prisoner to the foot of the altar.

The soldier was led forward into the arena. The guards fell back, the heavy gates were closed, and all possibility of escape shut out, except by the desperate expedient of leaping into the midst of the soldiery.

"Varus Dobella, a Christian," again said the ædile, "has been judged and condemned for the crime of abetting and leading on his comrades of that impious sect, in setting fire to the city of Rome. Yesterday, O Romans, his doom was pronounced—death by the combat. Yet the clemency of the Emperor, in consideration of the services rendered by him, in time past, to the state, has offered pardon, on condition that he here renounce the impious doctrines he has professed, and do homage to the gods."

As the ædile pronounced these words, a loud burst of applause proceeded from the soldiery: echoed with much ardor from the seats of the Equestrian order. It had scarcely subsided, however, when several distinct murmurs were heard from the excited populace above. "The combat—the combat—let the doom be executed, O Cæsar—death by the combat."

Nero shifted his position slightly, as he sat, and

the color varied upon his cheek. The ædile resumed the curule chair and the flamen of Jupiter stepped forward.

"Wilt thou sacrifice, soldier?" he said. "Lo! the sacred flame burns upon the altar, and the vase of incense is at thy feet."

"I cannot bow the knee," replied Dobella, in a subdued but firm tone, as a faint glow illuminated his features, "I cannot bow the knee to them which are no gods."

"Beware," resumed the ædile, holding up his hands, "beware, and rush not with impious madness upon thy fate."

"I rush not upon my fate," again replied Dobella, with a smile in which resolution and unshaken hope were blended, "but I know in whom I have believed, neither can I do homage to a senseless image. Hear me, O Cæsar—hear me men of Italy, hear me, nobles and senators of Rome. Of the crime of firing the city, the Emperor, in whose presence I stand, and to whose conscience, before heaven, I appeal, knows me to be guiltless. In the name of a Christian I glory, nor shall the aspect of death cause me to falter in the profession I have made. Through Him who strengtheneth me, I look fearlessly to the combat."

"He reviles the gods!" exclaimed the flamen abruptly, retreating to his place, with hands upraised to heaven.

"He reviles the gods!" shouted the populace, and the deep and savage cry was like the heavy roar which ushers in the tempest, "he reviles the gods—to the combat."

The vestal virgins veiled their brows, while the voice of each of the flamens was raised alternately

in the following hymn of invocation. At the conclusion of each stanza, the voices of the vestals united in the chorus.

I.

O thou ! enthroned in clouds,
At whose command the tempest, storm and fire,
Obedient heralds, round thy footsteps crowd,
While at the glance of thy triumphant ire
The vault of heaven is bow'd.
Almighty Jove ! reveal thine arm to smite
The vile blasphemer, and display thy might.

CHORUS OF VESTALS.

Accept the victim, and avert thine ire,
Smile on the prostrate realm that owns thy sway !
Let blood atone, with sacrificial fire
And turn from Rome th' avenging hand away !

II.

Queen of the heavenly host !
Thrice radiant Juno ! from thy starry throne
Palsy the lips that breathe this impious boast,
Consign the wretch that scorns thy rule to own
To the dim, Stygian coast,
There, rest of hope, 'neath Pluto's gloomy reign
To bear his hapless doom, in fierce unending pain.

CHORUS OF VESTALS.

Accept the sacrifice, benignant queen,
Avert the wrath of Jove—thy people spare !
In Rome's defence be thine old glory seen
And fix the eagles of thine empire there.

III.

Goddess of wisdom ! thou
Of the mild-beaming eye and brow serene,
Thou who to those that to thy sceptre bow
Dost give celestial light, withdraw O queen !
Thy sacred influence now
From the rebellious soul and impious mind
Of him who scoffs at truth, by wilful error blind.

CHORUS OF VESTALS.

Gods of victorious Rome, appeased look down !
Light, wisdom, power, to her counsels give,
With victory her glorious armies crown,
And round her altars fadeless laurels weave.

The hymn ceased, and a moment of silence succeeded, which was soon interrupted in a manner which caused the greater part of the audience to start to their feet with surprise. A loud strain of music from the voices of men and women, blended together in exquisite harmony, was heard in the ante-chamber of the spoliarium, occupied by the Christian prisoners, and the words which they sang were plainly distinguished.

I.

Saviour, who for man's redemption,
Once the vale of suffering trod,
From the curse to work exemption
And to bring the lost to God !
Cleanse our souls, ascended Jesus,
From the crimson stains of sin,
From the thrall of death release us ;
Aid us endless life to win.

II.

Saviour, who for man's transgression,
On the cross in anguish hung,
Break the bonds of our oppression,
Break the chains around us flung ;
Heal the hearts that bleed with anguish ;
Dry the penitential tears ;
Aid and strengthen us who languish ;
Chase away our ling'ring fears.

III.

God of strength and consolation,
Prophet, priest, ascended king !

Visit us with thy salvation.
 Shield us with thy guardian wing,
 As we pass the fiery trial,
 As we meet the lion's wrath,
 May no faltering or denial
 Shame thee on our martyr-path.

IV.

Saviour! we are frail and needy,
 Thou art strong and rich in grace;
 Visit us with succor speedy,
 Give us strength to end the race;
 Now the storms around us lower,
 We will trust in thee alone;
 Leaning on thine arm of power,
 Looking to thy gracious throne.

V.

Thou! who, in thine hour of passion,
 For thy murderers didst pray;
 In thy meek divine compassion,
 Smiling all their rage away;
 Pardon now, this people's blindness;
 Pardon their infuriate zeal;
 Quench their hate in heavenly kindness,
 Turn to flesh these hearts of steel.

Surprise and anger, not unmingled with admiration, enchainèd the audience as they listened to this unwonted response to the invocation of the flamens. When it ended, Nero stood upon his feet, his countenance burning with rage, impatiently gesturing to the lictors to open the gates and admit the lions to the arena. The features of Dobella retained the solemn smile they had worn before, but his eye was brighter, and the lips were parted as if in prayer, while he looked up to heaven.

Then rose on high the strong, angry cry of the multitude, and the words which the Emperor essayed to speak were drowned in the terrific shout.

"Admit the lions! they blaspheme the gods—they insult the majesty of Rome. All, *all* to the combat."

"Hold," exclaimed Flavius, bursting from the side of Metellus, and by an effort almost superhuman, springing over the railing of the arena. "I too am a Christian—I demand the combat with Dobella."

"Traitor, assassin!" shouted Tigellinus, "a death yet baser than the Christian's shall be thine. Seize him soldiers—he has violated his oath of allegiance—he has stained his hands with the blood of a faithful servant of Rome."

The tribune had gained the side of Dobella, ere he essayed to reply. In the meantime the gates of the arena were thrown open by the soldiers, who advanced to seize him, while others, fearing to resist the demands of the populace, or actuated by a baser motive, pushed aside the door of the ante-chamber where the Christians were confined.

"I am not careful to answer thee, Tigellinus," said Flavius, as he freed himself from the ardent embrace of his friend.

"Yet he shall be answered," exclaimed Sulpicius Asper, suddenly rising in his place. "Thou liest, unworthy præfect, my hand struck the base spy of Nero to the earth, and it is ready to do a nobler work, when the gods shall favor. So perish," he added, tearing the insignia of his office from his robes, and trampling them under foot, "so perish all ties by which I am bound to the tyrant. Monster—I spit at thee—I defy thee—and now, comrades, do your worst. I will at least perish by a nobler foe than the degenerate soldiery of Rome."

So saying, he rushed forward to the railing, but was arrested before he reached it. A slight disposition to favor his object was manifested by some of the band, but the vigor and celerity of his captors, inspired by the angry commands of the præfect, and the visible rage of the Emperor, soon prevailed to hurry him into confinement.

The ædile stood watching the countenance of the Emperor, who, as the confusion occasioned by the capture of Asper subsided, flung himself back upon his seat, and whispered hastily to Poppæa.

“Let him die!” he exclaimed at length.

A radiant smile illuminated the features of the tribune, as he heard the order. Folding Dobella to his breast, they sank together upon their knees, and heeded not the mad raging of the populace around them.

The ædile would have spoken again, but an impatient gesture from the Emperor, and the tumult among the spectators restrained him. He arose to give the order for the admission of the lions, and the tumult subsided. Then it was that a faint cry was heard from the ante-chamber, and a female form, clothed in white, darted through the open gates and rushed forward to the spot where the victims were kneeling. So suddenly did the beautiful apparition appear—so transcendently lovely was the countenance, on which the noblest and purest of human emotions had fixed their impress—so frail was the form, which yet seemed nerved with strength more than human, that every eye gazed upon it in admiration, every lip was mute with wonder.

Half the space between the gates and the altar had not been cleared before Salome was at her side. With one impulse, Dobella and the tribune, arose

from their knees—and, in the next moment, Julia of Baiæ was in the arms of her husband, and Salome veiled her features and sought protection at the feet of Dobella.

“Hold slaves,” cried the Emperor, as Tigellinus, with a burning brow, whispered in his ear, “the maiden will renounce—the maiden will do homage to the gods.”

“She will—she *must*,” shouted Tigellinus, darting a glance of lightning to the spot, while the blood left his lips in the intense and angry excitement of the moment. “She is deluded by accursed arts. Let her be borne from the arena.”

“He says well,” replied Nero, forgetting alike his fears and his cruelty in the surprise and admiration which kept his eyes riveted upon the arena, “the maiden is not yet adjudged to death.”

“She is called by a voice which even thou must obey,” said the recluse of Pausilippo, advancing from the gates of the prison. “Cæsar, the daughter of Metellus is the bride of the tribune.”

“Away, old babbler,” cried Tigellinus, fiercely, “these are ties which can be broken as lightly as they are woven. Follow, centurions, and bear the maiden from the arena!”

“I appeal for protection to the Roman people,” said Julia, casting a brief, brilliant glance around the crowded galleries. Her voice trembled, it is true, but all who heard it, felt that there was a nobler emotion than fear at her heart, “I am a Christian. I would die with my people.”

“Follow, centurions,” shouted Tigellinus again, springing into the midst of the soldiery below, “ye are bound by the will of the Emperor.”

“Forbear,” said more than one voice from the band, into the midst of which he had thrown himself. But he persisted in his purpose, until he reached the spot where Metellus was now struggling with his guards.

“My lord!” he said, suddenly confronting the patrician, “the Emperor here renews the offer of pardon—you know the conditions.”

“Away,” replied Metellus, drawing himself up, with a smile of sorrowful contempt, “away, I make no terms with such as thou!”

Stung to madness by the words and the manner of the patrician, the præfect cast one hasty glance towards the spot where Julia yet stood, leaning on the arm of her husband. He saw that a change had passed over her countenance; but the unusual paleness only rendered the features more exquisitely beautiful. And yet what a struggle was passing within. She had seen all—she had heard all. Her old and cherished hope of preserving the life of her father had risen again, with tenfold power—but it was that hope which borders on despair. Full-orbed as it was, the thick darkness was already rolling over it.

Encouraged by the signs of emotion which he saw, the præfect turned again to the patrician.

“Behold thy child, Metellus—snatch her from the base doom which she seeks. I ask not again; speak ere it be too late—command her, entreat her to renounce this impious faith.”

“Away, base courtier—away. Her life is an offering to heaven, indeed—and the breath of thy passion shall not sully it.”

“Then die in thy madness,” exclaimed the

furious courtier, no longer able to restrain his passion. The moment had not passed before his dagger had reached the heart of the patrician.

"Monster," shrieked a voice from the gallery, and in an instant the amphitheatre was one scene of confusion. The ædile endeavored in vain to control the chaos. A female form was observed rushing down one of the passages, and the uproar was so unusual, that none offered to interrupt her course. She sprang from the throng of knights in which, for a brief space, her course was stayed, across the podium, and alighted by the side of Tigellinus, ere he had cast the murderous weapon from his hand. Her first movement was to snatch the steel from his hand—her next, to plunge it into the breast of the assassin. As she did so, a wild ringing cry filled the air.

"He saved my child—he dies not unavenged."

"Miserable woman!" exclaimed Metellus, as he fell into the arms of an attendant, "you know not what you do—enough" his voice became choked, but still his accents were firm—"Hear me, Romans, I die a Christian. I pardon my murderers. —Farewell Julia! we shall meet—in—heaven."

The whole of this terrible scene had been the work almost, of a moment. It was not until her father fell, that the voice of the Roman maiden was heard. A half-suppressed shriek burst from her lips; but it was quickly hushed. She felt the arms of Salome around her. She heard her father's words, and her spirit revived within her. She stood upon her feet, and extended her hand to Dobella. She was strangely calm as he folded her in his embrace. She was strangely calm as she

turned to impress her fervent, holy kiss upon the lips of her husband.

“Support me, yet for a moment, Flavius ;” she said, “and when I am gone, be strong—be strong. Dread not the lions’ rage, for death shall bring us together. Closer, Salome, let me hear thy voice once more. O Christ ! thou art mighty ; thou art stronger than man. Forgive these misguided men—forgive and touch their hearts by the power of thy Cross.”

The vast audience which had settled for the moment into the stillness of consternation, again lifted up its brutal voice, and the ædile dared no longer to delay to answer it.

“She blasphemes—clear the arena—the lions.”

“Admit the lions !” shouted Nero.

Then a piercing shriek, so wild, so full of agony, that it entered into every ear, and thrilled every heart, was heard. It was the cry of Salome.

“I hear, I hear !” murmured Julia, and all assembled there listened to the accents, as if they had been the accents of an angel, “I hear the angels singing, and I come. Blessed Jesus, receive my spirit.”

A bright triumphant smile illuminated her features, as she raised her countenance to heaven and fell backward. It was even so. In that moment of love and devotion, the silver cord was loosed, and the bands of life gave way. Flavius clasped the beautiful corpse in his arms, and the smile lingered upon the features. The gates of the arena were again unclosed, and the terrific roar of the lions, as they caught the first glimpse of their prey, shook their soul of every spectator. Onward they came—lashing themselves into fury, and answering with horrible discord, the peal

of the Prætorian trumpet. The gates closed behind them; but the martyrs stood in prayer, as if entranced. They heeded them not—each of the living seemed to behold a strengthening angel at his side; and the soul of Julia of Baiæ was with God.



Reader! who hast journeyed with us to this, our parting spot, think not that we have essayed to summon up these pictures of the past (pictures, alas! all too faint and imperfect,) for the amusement of an idle hour. As the feeble illusion fades from thy mind, ere thou plungest again into the midst of that actual battle which thou art waging beneath the stars, and which is thine earthly life, listen one moment to that voice which cometh from heaven.

“Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord, from henceforth. Even so, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the Throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

NOTES.

Note 1, page 8. A City of the Siren.—The moral of the ingenious fable, which supposes Naples to have been built upon the tomb of Parthenope, one of the Sirens, is perhaps this:—that the city is blessed with one of those climates which, on account of their extreme voluptuousness, are so dangerous to virtue.

Note 2, page 9. A modern visiter.—In the sketch of the scenery, etc., of this chapter, the author acknowledges his obligation to the interesting volumes of Mr. Rockwell, recently published.

Note 3, page 10. Beloved Parthenope.—The city of Parthenope was built by the Chalcidians. It was afterwards destroyed by the people of Cumæ, and a pestilence taking place, was rebuilt by the same people, under the name of Neapolis, or the New City—now Naples.

Note 4, page 14. The author has entirely relied on the authority of Gibbon, from whose “Decline and Fall” this paragraph is extracted.

Note 5, page 14. A living historian.—The Rev. H. H. Milman,—from whose “History of Christianity” this and a succeeding extract are made.

Note 6, page 182. Those who are familiar with Mr. Milman’s beautiful drama of “the Martyr of Antioch,” will pardon the author for transferring so rich a gem as this to his pages.

Note 7, page 191. See Tacitus, “Annals, XVI. section 32.” Mr. Murphy’s elegant translation of these passages has been freely used.

Note 8, page 197. "Hymn at the lamp-lighting."—The author has given what he fears to be a very feeble translation of this delightful little hymn. The words of the original, as quoted by Archbishop Usher, are as follows: "Φῶς ἱλαρὸν δοξης ἀβανάτου Πατρὸς οὐρανοῦ, ἁγίου, μάχαρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐλθόντες ἐπὶ τοῦ ἡλίου δυσιν, ἰδόντες φῶς ἐσπερινὸν ὑμνοῦμεν Πατέρα καὶ Υἱὸν καὶ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα Θεοῦ. Ἀξίος εἶ ἐν πασι χαίροις ὑμνέισθαι φῶναις ὅσαις Ὑιὲ Θεοῦ ζῶην ὁ διδοῦς. Διὸ ὁ κόσμος σε δοξάζει.

Basil says that it was a custom of the early Christians to return thanks to the three persons of the godhead, by name, in this hymn, when the lamps were first lighted in the evening.

Note 9, page 220. The death of a hero.—Lucan, after all, exhibited great fortitude in his death; expiring with that celebrated passage of his Pharsalia in his mouth, which the reader will find quoted in the commencement of the last chapter of the third book.

Note 10, page 234. The temple, etc.—The remains of the Temple of Jupiter Serapis, and of the Amphitheatre at Puteoli, are remarkable even at this day.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The publishers of "Julia of Baiæ," in issuing a second edition of the work, are happy to announce that another Roman story connected with the history and persecutions of the Christians during the splendid and eventful reign of TRAJAN, is in preparation, by the same author. The following are among the many favorable notices which "Julia of Baiæ" has already received from the press. Orders should be addressed to SAXTON & MILES, Booksellers and Publishers, No. 205 Broadway. New York.

November 20th, 1842.

From the New York American.

In these days, when the press teems with tales of fashionable life and its mere frivolities, it is refreshing to meet with some production that carries us back to times and scenes worthy of the study and contemplation of men. We have travelled so often through the well-worn paths of modern fictions, that we are tired of "Tales of the days of Chivalry," "of Fashion," "of the Sea," "of Indian Life," and the thousand et ceteras, so well known to novelists; and find it delightful to sit down to the perusal of a story somewhat out of the beaten track. The author of this work translates us to Rome and Baiæ, not as they now are, but as they were in their resplendent glory in the days of the Emperors. The time is laid in that eventful period when Christianity was struggling in the fresh vigor of her primal vitality with the full power of heathenism—with a persecution none the less bloody because it was the expiring effort of the ancient superstitions. The author has availed himself with great ability, eloquence and powers of imagination, of the materials afforded by his subject, for contrasting the purity, the unwavering firmness, the martyr heroism, and the noble

principles, which were the fruit of Christianity, with the licentiousness, the blind and bloody violence, and the abandoned profligacy, which were the proper results of heathenism. Though presented in a popular form, the story, from the classic simplicity and elegance of the narration, as from other causes, partakes of the style of the antique, and in some parts rises to the dignity of pure tragedy. The beneficial influence of works of this character upon public taste and morals, must always recommend them to the attention of those who are interested in the social condition of the age; and we cannot refrain from commending this tale, as high-toned in moral and Christian principles, as well as being one of the most delightful productions in the class of historic fictions.

From the New York Churchman.

Vivacity, truth to nature, philosophy, and a substratum of sound principle, are characteristics of this agreeable and thrilling story, which excites without enfeebling the affections. The work is altogether superior to the former essays of the author in the same kind of writing; and we take it as the pledge, for which we have long looked and which we hold him bound to redeem, of his ability to reclaim for the Church a species of literature which the world and a class of religionists who are unwittingly subservient to its lusts, are constantly employing to her detriment.

From the Christian Intelligencer.

This volume is a graphic portraiture of "old Romans," not as delineated in the romances of the infidel, but as drawn by Paul the Apostle, with a vivid distinctness in the scenery, and a lofty description of Christian virtues, as recorded in the ancient Martyrology. While perusing it, the pictures of Roman life, stamped upon our memory by the studies of boyhood as derived from the Latin historians and poets of the first century, were revived in all their clearness of perception, and sometimes we almost fancied ourselves among the barbarians who saw Nero fiddling for joy amid the combustion of Rome that he kindled, and in the amphitheatre appalled by the lions while devouring the Christian martyrs. There are two poetic pieces which are worth the price of the volume, the "Hymn at the lighting of the lamps," p. 197, and the "Chant of the Christian prisoners," who were in the "antechamber of the Spoliarum," waiting to be introduced into the amphitheatre for martyrdom. The narrative

is rich with Christian truth and eloquence, and the impression which it makes is highly salutary; for it fills the soul with abhorrence of pagan abominations, and produces devout admiration of Christian piety, with unfeigned desire to "follow them who through faith and, patience inherit the promises."

From the New York Tribune.

So far as we have been able to examine this book we deem it one of no little merit. The scene and the time selected undoubtedly possess features of the highest interest, and which, if properly wrought into fictitious narrative, could not fail to present the best elements of the novelist's strength. The trials of the early Christian martyrs, and the spirit with which they were endured, are well portrayed in this tale, and cannot fail to engage the interest of the reader. The author is already known as a pleasing writer, whose productions moreover always contain something of positive value to the interests of religion and morality.

From the Journal of Commerce.

This is a story of the Martyrs, exhibiting in lively colors, persecutions they endured under the licentious and tyrannical Nero. The tale commences at the time when Nero, in revenge for the attempt of his mother Agrippina to elevate Britannicus to the imperial throne, sought her death. Julia, the heroine, the daughter of the senator Julius Metellus, is a Christian; and with her death, this tragic story concludes. The descriptions of the royal festivities of Baïæ, of the burning of the city, and of the inhuman massacre of thousands of Christians by the rack and in the amphitheatre, are vividly described. The author professes to follow the descriptions of Tacitus in his principal characters. He has chosen an age of crime, and consequently, the characters most conspicuous in the work are transcendant models of virtue, or infamous in wickedness. The whole is a faithful view of the history of the time. Published and for sale by Messrs. Saxton & Miles.

From the Boston Daily Bee.

This tale is connected with some of those tragical events which have made the reign of Nero a proverb among men, and contains a faithful but condensed view of the history and spirit of the time. Although the course of the story is strictly connected with historical events, the author has availed him-

NOTICES.

self of the liberty allowed to writers of fiction, to deviate somewhat from strict chronological order. It is a work that will be read with interest and no little profit.

From the Schenectady Cabinet.

This volume graphically describes scenes connected with the persecutions of the Christians under the Roman Emperor Nero ; and its object is to give the reader some idea of the ardor and steadfastness, as well as pureness of faith, amidst sufferings and persecutions, of the early Roman believers of the "truth as it is in Jesus," at the same time filling the mind with abhorrence of pagan abominations. Though the course of the story is strictly connected with historical events, the author has availed himself of the privileges of writers of fiction and departed from strict chronological order. The rescue of the mother of Nero—the conversion of Julia—the funeral—the baptism—the burning of Rome, and the final martyrdom, are described with vividness and beauty.

From the Flushing Journal.

If the preceding works of this author have acquired for him an enviable reputation, the present production is calculated greatly to increase his popularity. It is a story of the martyrs, and presents a noble picture of Christian constancy and baffled patriotism grappling with the terrors of an iron despotism. The scene is laid at Naples and its environs, in the age of Nero. The reader is made a witness to the conflict of great principles—to that fearful struggle which resulted finally in the overthrow of an absurd and malignant superstition, and the exaltation of Christianity. One of the most striking characteristics of the author is an exceedingly quick sensibility to the external beauties of nature. All his rural scenes are invested with a peculiar freshness and beauty. What can be finer, for instance, than the description of "Baia the beautiful" at the opening of the third book? We seem to look out upon the soft landscape, to listen to the sound of the distant waterfall, to hear the wind rustling among the leaves, and to exult in the sunlight that is shed over and consecrates the scene. The ode to Parthenope is a beautiful gem, and alone worth the entire cost of the volume. This is incomparably the best work which has yet fallen from the pen of the author, but he is capable of still greater achievements. If we might venture a word of advice, it would be, that he write hereafter with less haste, and with an eye more steadily fixed on futurity.

From the New York Observer.

This is another of a succession of interesting volumes for which we are indebted to the pen of the same gifted author. Its object is to portray Christianity during the period of the most relentless persecutions, and it is written in the chaste and pleasing style characteristic of its author.

From the Brother Jonathan.

From Saxton & Miles we have a historical tale entitled "Julia of Baiæ, or the Days of Nero." It is a story of the Martyrs, and is written by the author of the "Merchant's Daughter," "Virginia," "Christmas Bells," &c. The subject is certainly a very interesting one, and the former works of the writer lead us to believe it is well treated, but we have not had time to examine the work critically.

From the Boston Daily Mail.

We hope to see this work in every family where the rising generation are to be instructed.

From Hunt's Merchant's Magazine.

This is a tale of great interest, in the usual chaste, simple, and graphic style of the author.

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